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New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tileuberdi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Ambassador Necton Darlington Mhura, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malawi to the United Nations

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset of this meeting, I should like, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, to express profound grief and sorrow at the passing of His Excellency Mr. Nector Darlington Mhura, Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations. The members of the Council convey their deepest sympathy to the family of Ambassador Mhura and to the Government and the people of Malawi.

Today also marks the one-year anniversary of the passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation.

I now invite the members of the Council to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Ambassador Mhura and in memory of the late Ambassador Churkin.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the President of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Observer State of Palestine, and I request the Protocol Officer to escort him to a seat at the Council table.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Observer State of Palestine, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: I have just returned from a visit to Kuwait, which generously hosted a conference on the reconstruction of Iraq and helped mobilize critical resources. The international community showed its gratitude to the Iraqi people for their courageous victory over Da'esh. The support is a vote of confidence in the Government and the people of Iraq. Kuwait, Mr. President, played a very important leadership role in that very successful meeting.

Unfortunately, positive developments in Iraq are an exception in the region. That context underscores the need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for far too long. I am here to reiterate my full personal commitment, and the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the parties in their efforts to achieve a two-State solution — a solution of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders; and a solution that addresses all final-status issues on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and mutual agreements. There is no plan B.

Yet we must face today's sad reality. After decades of support, the global consensus for a two-State solution could be eroding. Obstacles on the ground have the potential to create an irreversible one-State reality. It is simply impossible to square the circle of a one-State reality with the legitimate national, historic and democratic aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

At the same time, conditions for Palestinians in Gaza, which has been under the control of Hamas for a decade, are dire. Shortfalls in the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are a matter of international concern. The human security, rights and dignity of 5 million Palestine refugees are at stake. So, too, is the stability of the region. I appeal to the international community to step up its generous support.

This is a time for dialogue, for reconciliation, for reason. At this moment of grave consequence, I appeal for effective concerted action by all parties. It is more important than ever.

Allow me now, Mr. President, to ask you to give the floor to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, to deliver his monthly briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: We meet this month as regional tensions are taking an increasingly perilous turn. Fighting in Syria is increasing, endangering de-escalation arrangements and regional stability, as well as undermining efforts for a political solution. Despite the positive news from Iraq and the defeat of Da'esh, much of the Middle East continues to be in the grips of an ongoing human tragedy of immense proportions.

Against that backdrop, and after over a century of hostilities, including 50 years of continued military occupation, Israelis and Palestinians are still no closer to peace. Many have lost hope that they will see it in their lifetimes. The enemies of peace are growing more confident by the day. They see every failure of the forces of moderation as a win for the forces of radicalization. They believe the political odds are turning in their favour. Day after day they are emboldened. Hindering peace are also those who push facts on the ground and who promote unilateral moves blocking the pathway back to the negotiating table.

None of that will bring us closer to resolving the conflict. None of it will respond to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to statehood or the Israeli longing for security. It will only drive us farther down the road of confrontation, suffering and a one-State reality of perpetual occupation.

Last month the international community discussed key priorities to advance the goal of peace at the extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. At that meeting, I was encouraged by widespread, unequivocal messages reaffirming support for the two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and the need to resume meaningful negotiations over all final-status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. Participants also made a critical commitment to undertaking efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including support for projects focused on water, electricity and economic recovery.

My message to all was clear. First, we must clearly reaffirm that sustainable peace requires a two-State solution, which can be achieved only through a negotiated process. Israelis and Palestinians have defined the final-status issues and only they, together, can determine their resolution. Secondly, efforts must continue to seek implementation of concrete and transformative steps on the ground — including ending Israeli settlement expansion and advancing policy shifts, particularly in Area C — consistent with a transition to greater Palestinian civil authority, as called for in the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet. Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must continue to advance institution-building and service delivery to the Palestinian people and work towards bringing Gaza back under its control. Lastly, it is critical that any future peace proposal focus on the two-State solution and all final-status issues, as per prior agreements and relevant United Nations resolutions. Failure to do so could have dangerous repercussions.

Maintaining support for Palestine refugees is fundamental to the pursuit of peace and stability in the region. I reiterate my ongoing concern over the sizeable funding shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), despite the welcome flexibility of some Member States in accelerating the disbursement of their funding commitments. In addition, the emergency appeals launched on 30 January seek to raise $800 million for the West Bank and Gaza, as well as for the Syria regional crisis, to meet the essential needs of some 1.5 million highly vulnerable people. I encourage Member States to consider urgently providing new funding for UNRWA's critical requirements.

As the peace process falters and the gulf between the two sides widens, Palestinians and Israelis continue to suffer the violent consequences on the ground. Seven

Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in various incidents across the occupied Palestinian territory, and one Israeli civilian was stabbed and killed by a Palestinian in the West Bank. Three of the Palestinians killed died during violent clashes with Israeli security forces; one of them was a 16-year-old, shot near Ramallah. He was the fourth child killed in such circumstances since the beginning of the year.

I once again emphasize that the use of force must be calibrated and that lethal force should be used only as a last resort, with any resulting fatalities properly investigated by the authorities. I urge Israeli security forces to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid casualties in such circumstances. I call upon all sides to reject violence, condemn terror, ensure accountability and work to reduce tensions.

In recent days we have also witnessed dangerous security incidents in and around Gaza. On 17 February, four Israeli soldiers were wounded by an improvised explosive device placed at the Gaza fence. This was followed by Israeli airstrikes on some 18 Hamas targets, while Palestinian militants fired two rockets into Israel — one causing damage to a house in the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. Two Palestinian teens were killed by Israeli security forces while reportedly attempting to approach the fence. Prior to this latest flare-up, during the course of the past month three more rockets were fired towards Israel, with two Israeli retaliatory airstrikes, all without injuries.

I encourage the international community to join the United Nations in calling on militants in Gaza to refrain from such provocations and end the building of tunnels and the firing of rockets towards Israel. Such actions and the response they elicit only risk the lives of Palestinians and Israelis, undermine peace efforts and increase the likelihood of another devastating conflict. I also take this opportunity to note the need to resolve the matter of the missing Israeli soldiers and civilians who are being held in Gaza.

Two additional incidents highlight the risk of escalation and the need for continued Israeli-Palestinian security coordination. These were the discovery of 12 roadside bombs in the West Bank on 26 January and the foiled attempt on 4 February to smuggle, within a shipment of medical equipment, a dual-use component used to make explosives into Gaza. I also note that the trial of 17-year-old Palestinian girl Ahed Tamimi started on 13 February behind closed doors. She has been detained on remand for two months to date. As stated in my last briefing (see S/PV.8167), the detention of a child must be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time.

Throughout the reporting period, Israel's illegal settlement-related activities continued unabated. In response to last month's killing of a resident of the illegal Havat Gilad outpost, on 4 February, Israel approved the establishment of a new settlement to absorb its residents. I strongly denounce the expansion of the settlement enterprise as compensation for Israeli deaths. Settlement construction is not a morally appropriate way to respond to murder. On 12 February, Israel also advanced two settlement plans for some 85 housing units near Bethlehem. I reiterate the long-standing United Nations position that all settlement-related activities are illegal under international law and a substantial obstacle to peace, and I call on Israel to seize and reverse such policies.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures also continued, with 31 structures affected, resulting in 33 Palestinians being displaced. Particularly concerning was the demolition of two donor-funded classrooms serving Palestinian children in the Bedouin community of Abu Nuwar. This is the sixth demolition or confiscation in the school since February 2016. Overall, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 44 schools in the occupied West Bank are currently at risk of demolition. I urge Israel to cease this practice.

I briefed the Council last week on the situation in Gaza. Month after month, we have raised the alarm about the humanitarian, economic and ecological calamity underway. It bears repeating that the situation is unsustainable. Continuing power cuts of up to 20 hours per day severely undermine the provision of basic services. Without additional immediate fuel deliveries, the situation could deteriorate, with dramatic consequences. I reiterate the Secretary-General's appreciation to the United Arab Emirates and the State of Qatar for their support in dealing with the emergency. Their immediate response to our appeal has helped stave off a further deterioration.

I am encouraged by the trilateral meeting I had last week with Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah and Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Major General Mordechai, in which we focused on the humanitarian problems in Gaza. Both

sides reaffirmed their commitment to the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and agreed that there is a need for a joint review to improve its functionality, transparency and predictability.

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza escalates, the implementation of the Egyptian-brokered intra-Palestinian agreement has stalled. Absent immediate steps to address the humanitarian crisis and to revive the economy, we will face a total institutional and economic collapse in Gaza. This is not an alarmist prediction; it is a fact. I welcome the proposal of the Palestinian Government to incorporate into its 2018 budget some 20,000 civil service employees in Gaza. A positive outcome, however, is contingent, inter alia, upon the collection of taxes, the payment of salaries, the return of Government administration and, ultimately, security control of Gaza. I urge all sides to intensify their engagement and to move forward in this process.

For a decade, 2 million people have lived under the full control of Hamas, with crippling Israeli closures and movement and access restrictions. Throughout this period, the international community has provided aid and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering and to rebuild what was destroyed in three devastating conflicts. It is time to break this cycle. It is time to return Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, for there can be no Palestinian State without Palestinian unity. Those who stand in the way of reconciliation hurt the Palestinian national cause, and the price will be paid by generations of ordinary people.

The security situation in the Golan is also a growing concern. A worrying escalation occurred on 10 February, when the Israel Defense Forces destroyed what they identified as an Iranian unmanned aerial vehicle, which had reportedly entered its airspace from Syria. Shortly thereafter, Israeli aircraft targeted a Syrian airbase. During the attack, one Israeli jet was hit, injuring two pilots, which further prompted Israel to attack what it described as "12 military objectives" inside Syria. I urge all sides to work towards easing tensions in that highly volatile area.

I now turn briefly to Lebanon. Heightened rhetoric was exchanged between Israel and Lebanon over disputed maritime areas. The United Nations continues to call on the sides to act responsibly, avoid security risks and explore with the support of the United Nations ways to resolve the issue. Preparations continue for May parliamentary elections in Lebanon and for the upcoming second Rome conference and the Cedre conference to support the security sector and economy, respectively on 15 March and 5 April. While the situation was generally quiet in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, and despite heightened rhetoric concerning proposed construction by the Israeli Defense Forces in so-called reservation areas in Lebanon south of the Blue Line, construction began in non-reservation areas on 7 February with no incidents reported.

In conclusion, and to return to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I would like to reiterate that we in the international community must continue advocating for substantial changes to Israeli policy on the situation in the West Bank, including a halt to settlement construction, the demolition of structures and the prevention of Palestinian development in Area C. On Gaza, we must work collectively to alleviate the humanitarian disaster and provide full support to Egypt's reconciliation efforts. Our support to UNRWA also remains vital. I also hope that we will be able to look beyond the closed, dark negotiation rooms, currently empty of diplomats and politicians, to see that there are Israeli and Palestinian advocates for peace working tirelessly to promote change — civil-society organizations, youth and women's groups and religious and community leaders, which all have a critical role to play and must be supported and allowed to express their views freely. We rarely discuss their role and we do not speak often enough of the challenges they face, but their efforts must be recognized and supported.

In this Chamber we have often spoken of the need for leadership on both sides if we are to reach a deal — a compromise, through negotiations — that will enable the Israelis and Palestinians to separate and be masters of their own fates. But they would not be negotiations between equals, for one side is under military occupation. Its leadership has committed to working for a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations. I urge the international community not to give up on support for the moderate Palestinian leadership or for building up the institutions that will increase the chances of success. Our window of opportunity is closing, and if we do not seize it quickly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be engulfed in the whirlwind of religious radicalization that continues to roil the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to President Abbas.

President Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): Seventy years have passed since Palestine's Nakba took place and resulted in 6 million Palestinian refugees who continue to suffer from the cruelty of their exile and loss of human security and to wander the world after losing their peaceful, stable lives in their towns and villages. They are part of the 13 million Palestinians whose country has not yet been recognized as a full State Member of the United Nations, despite numerous international resolutions affirming their right to self-determination and to statehood in their national lands.

We are the heirs of the Canaanites who lived in Palestine more than 5,000 years ago and whose descendants have remained there to this day. Our great people remain rooted in their land. The Palestinian people have built their own cities and homeland and made contributions to humankind and civilization that the whole world has witnessed. They have established institutions, schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, theatres, libraries, publishing houses, newspapers, economic institutions, businesses and banks with wide regional and international influence. All of that existed before and after the Balfour Declaration, issued by the British Government in 1917, according to which people who had no ownership in Palestine gave it away to people who had no right to it. The British Government bears responsibility for the disastrous consequences inflicted on our Palestinian people as a result of the Declaration.

Since then, and despite the fact that our people have remained under occupation, they have continued their journey, building and developing their country after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Their national institutions are recognized by international bodies for their merit and their work, which is founded on the principles of the rule of law, transparency and accountability, and the empowerment of women and young people in an environment of tolerance, cultural coexistence and non-discrimination. We have continued to strive to unite our people and our land, and to ensure that we are ruled by a single authority with a single body of law and united armed forces, and we are determined to ensure that we convene parliamentary and presidential elections.

Our belief is deeply rooted and our position on the use of arms of any kind is clear. Not only do we call for all nuclear weapons to be dismantled, we are also opposed to conventional weapons, which have caused such terrible destruction in many States in our region and all over the world. That is why we are committed to fostering a culture of peace, rejecting violence, pursuing sustainable development and building schools, hospitals, industrial zones, farms and technological production rather than establishing arms factories and buying tanks and fighter jets. We want our people to be able to live in freedom and dignity, far from wars and destruction. For the price of one tank we can build a school and provide protection for a generation. For the price of one fighter jet we can build a hospital and provide health protection for a generation much better than all weapons, conventional or otherwise.

What we really want for our people is a life of freedom and dignity, far from wars and destruction and from terrorism and extremism, which we are working relentlessly to combat all over the globe. Because of this, we signed 83 security agreements with 83 States around the world, including the United States, Russia and other countries of Europe and elsewhere. We have only one goal in signing these agreements, and that is fighting terrorism regardless of its grounds or origin.

Why are we here today? After a long journey and tremendous efforts to establish a political path based on negotiations that could lead to a comprehensive and just peace, we participated, as everyone knows, in the Madrid Conference in 1991 and signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. We were alone there with the Israelis and the Norwegians. The Oslo Accords affirmed the importance of arriving at a settlement of final-status issues before 1999. Unfortunately, that has not yet come to pass. We must therefore ask why it has still not been achieved although it is stipulated in the Accords.

Despite this, we have persisted in our efforts to achieve peace. We engaged in dialogue at Wye River and Camp David. We participated in the Annapolis Conference. We held talks with the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for eight months. We met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in the presence of the former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and George Mitchell. We also accepted President Putin's invitation to meet with Mr. Netanyahu in Moscow, but he has regrettably evaded participating in such a meeting. We further engaged in all earnest with former Secretary of State John Kerry, but the Israeli Government's intransigence resulted in the failure of all of those efforts. After that, how can it be said that it is we who reject negotiations? We have never refused any invitation to participate in negotiations. We believe

that negotiations are the only path towards peace. How then could we reject them? Believe me, that it is untrue.

Confronted with deadlock, we have neither given up nor lost hope. We have come to the United Nations believing in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which affirm, inter alia, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, as well as a people's right to self-determination. Article 40 and 41 reaffirm that. Nobody has held Israel accountable for occupying our territories in 1948. The Charter affirms the right of people to self-determination, which is among the issues the Council will address tomorrow. We continue to engage with all of its bodies in our quest to end the occupation of our land and people. Yet, in spite of all of that, the United Nations has failed to implement its relevant resolutions to date. Is that possible? Is it logical that despite the adoption of 705 General Assembly resolutions since 1948 and 86 Security Council resolutions in our favour, none of them have been implemented? Where are those resolutions that the Council has adopted? There are 86 Security Council resolutions, with no result whatsoever.

Is it logical for Israel to neglect its obligation to implement General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III)? As members of the Council may recall, those two resolutions were sine qua non for Israel to be accepted to the United Nations. Moshe Sharett wrote a letter indicating that he was ready to implement them. Owing to that commitment, Israel was accepted at the United Nations. However, up to this very day, those two resolutions have yet to be implemented.

Israel is acting as a State above the law. It has transformed the occupation from a temporary situation, as per international law, into a situation of a permanent colonization of territories that it has occupied since 1967. It was supposed to be temporary; however, it has become permanent. It colonized all the areas that it wanted, including Jerusalem, which the Council considers an occupied territory. How can that happen? Israel has shut all doors on the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Here, we reaffirm, as we have done in the past, that our problem is not with the followers of Judaism. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, as are Christianity and Islam. Our problem is only with the occupiers of our land and those denying our independence and freedom, regardless of their religion.

We met with the President of the United States, Mr. Donald Trump, four times in 2017. We expressed our absolute readiness to reach a historic peace agreement. We repeatedly reaffirmed our position, in accordance with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Yet that Administration has not clarified its position. Is it for the two-State solution or the one-State solution?

Subsequently, in a dangerous and unprecedented manner, the United States Administration made an unlawful decision, which was rejected by the international community, that resulted in taking the issue of Jerusalem off the table, without reason. It decided to recognize the city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and transfer its Embassy there. It did so ignoring that East Jerusalem is part of Palestinian territory. It has been occupied since 1967, and it is our capital, which we wish to be a city that is open to all the faithful of the monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

It is also strange that the United States still includes the Palestine Liberation Organization on its terrorist list and imposes restrictions on the work of our Mission in Washington, D.C., under the pretext of congressional decisions since 1987. Despite our bilateral relations with the United States, including assistance, visits and broad relations, we come to discover that the United States Congress believes we are terrorists. If the Congress believes we are terrorists, how is it that the Administration has relations with us? How is it visiting us? How is it providing assistance to us? How can it help terrorists?

Most recently, the United States has decided to punish Palestinian refugees by reducing its contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in spite of the facts that it supported the Agency's establishment and that it endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for a just and agreed solution for the plight of the refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The United States has contradicted itself. It has contradicted its own commitments and violated international law and relevant resolutions with its decision regarding Jerusalem. No country alone can resolve a regional or international conflict without the participation of other international partners. Therefore, it is our view and position that in order to

solve the Palestinian question it is essential to establish a multilateral international mechanism that emanates from an international conference and is in line with international law and relevant resolutions.

Faced with Israel's policies and practices in violation of international law and its non-compliance and non-implementation of agreements signed, the Palestinian Central Council — the highest Palestinian parliamentary body — decided several weeks ago to re-evaluate the relationship with Israel. Indeed, we will review the relationship, given that we have become an Authority without authority and the occupation has come at a great cost. We are even working for the occupation as its employees. We say that Israel must uphold its obligations as an occupying Power.

We do not oppose Israel shouldering its responsibility in the West Bank and Gaza because the situation is unbearable and unacceptable. In spite of that, before the Council I reaffirm our commitment to maintaining our institutions and achievements, which we have carried out on the ground in Palestine and in the international arena, thanks to the assistance of those present. We are determined to remain committed to the political, diplomatic and legal path, rejecting all violence and through political negotiations which we have never rejected. We will continue to extend our hands to make peace and work to end the Israeli occupation, based on the two-State solution along 1967 borders — two States recognized by the international community — pursuant to the relevant resolutions.

We want to realize our national aspirations, but at the same time we will continue to oppose any attempt from any side to impose solutions undermining that legitimacy. We will reject with all our capabilities any solution that violates that legitimacy. We have been granted the status of non-member observer State by the General Assembly, based upon which we have become State party to 105 international institutions, organizations and treaties. We have been recognized by 138 States. All of that has further strengthened the status of the State of Palestine, which continues to seek other recognition by the remaining States in the world, including States Members on the Council that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine despite the fact that the recognition of the State of Palestine does not negate negotiations. Recognition does not run contrary to negotiations, but rather promotes them. I therefore call on members that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to do so. In the future, we will intensify our work to achieve admission as a full Member to the United Nations. We came to the Council once with that proposition and were rejected. We will come again and ensure international protection for our people. We will come to the Council and appeal for international protection for our people.

The situation is no longer tolerable. Members have listened to the Special Coordinator's briefing and we hope that they will support our efforts to secure the rights of 13 million Palestinians yearning for an independent homeland, just like every people in the world, and for their State to assume its rightful place within the international community. I say 13 million Palestinians, and others say that that is not true. But we are 13 million Palestinians whether we live within Palestine or in other countries.

I have come here before the Council in the middle of the deadlock in the peace process caused by the decision of the United States regarding Jerusalem, Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activities, its failure to respect signed agreements and its violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the latest of which is resolution 2334 (2016). We are here because of the Palestinians' desire to continue working constructively and courageously. We have the full courage to say yes and the full courage to say no, based on international law and our interests. We are here to build a culture of peace, reject violence, save the principle of two-States, obtain security and stability for all, restore hope to our people and the peoples of the region, and find a way out of the impasse which we face. We believe in comprehensive, lasting and just peace that is a strategic choice for the sake of future generations in our region, Palestinians and Israelis. I will therefore inform the Council about our plan.

First, we call for the convening of an international peace conference by mid-2018, predicated upon international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, with broad international participation, including the two parties concerned and regional and international stakeholders, foremost among them the permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet in the same framework as the Paris conference for peace in the Middle East and the conference to be held in Moscow in line with resolution 1850 (2009). We have accordingly called for the convening of an international peace conference. The conference in Paris was attended by representatives of 74 States.

The outcome of the proposed conference should be as follows.

First, during its initial phase, it should result in the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member to the United Nations, and that is what we deserve. Does not everyone here believe that we deserve to become a full Member? Why not? We call on the Security Council to realize that goal. We will come to the Council in line with General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012, adopted by 138 votes in favour to 9 votes against, which supported our non-member observer status and guaranteed international protection for our people based on the 1967 borders and the exchange of recognition between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel along the 1967 borders.

During its second phase, it should result in the establishment of an international multilateral mechanism that will facilitate negotiations between the two parties to resolve all permanent status issues as defined by the Oslo Accords, including the issues of Jerusalem, borders, security, settlements, refugees, water and prisoners, which are to be resolved through an agreement by both parties. Negotiations leading up to that mechanism must be based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and their outcome must be implemented within a corresponding time frame with assurances for that implementation. Negotiations are to be defined by a timeline at the end of which the agreement must be implemented. That is the only way to resolve this long-standing conflict in the Middle East.

Secondly, during negotiations all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, in particular any that would prejudice the outcome of final-status negotiations, as set forth in the Oslo Accords of 1993. The Oslo Accords stipulate that all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, and, above all, any solution must be based on the cessation of settlement activities in territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the suspension of the decision concerning Jerusalem and the transfer of the United States embassy there, as that hinders negotiations. The relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), must be respected. At the same time, the State of Palestine would refrain from joining other organizations, as we have already committed ourselves to 22 international organizations out of 500 organizations and treaties. We have committed and we continue to be committed, although unfortunately the United States Administration did not fulfil its commitment.

Thirdly, the Arab Peace Initiative must be implemented, as adopted from A to Z, and not from Z to A. According to the Initiative, the Palestinian question must be resolved first, before regional issues. That was affirmed by the Initiative and all Arabs and Muslims who have adopted it. When the Initiative is implemented and the State of Palestine is recognized within the 1967 borders and the problem is resolved, all Arabs and Muslims will be ready to recognize the State of Israel — all Arabs and Muslims. All 57 Arab and Muslim countries will recognize the State of Israel and normalize relations with it, as stipulated in several Arab summit agreements. In that regard, we reiterate the terms of reference for any upcoming negotiations, including, first, respect for international law.

We are a State, but that has not yet been recognized. Nevertheless, we affirm respect for international law and relevant resolutions. First, all resolutions must be respected, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), through to resolution 2334 (2016), and the Arab Peace Initiative, along with signed agreements. Secondly, we affirm the preservation of the principle of the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security on the basis of 4 June 1967 borders. We reject partial solutions and a State that has provisional borders. Thirdly, we call for the acceptance of minimal land swaps that are equal in value and size in accordance with an agreement between the two parties. Fourthly, East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine, open to the members of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Fifthly, we must ensure the security of the two States, without undermining their independence and sovereignty, by the presence on the borders of a third party to protect Israel and Palestine. Sovereignty is key and cannot be preserved by hegemony and control. Sixthly, there must be a just and agreed upon solution for Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III) and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative. Pending a just solution for the refugees' issue, there must be ongoing international commitment and support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Who will take care of the 6 million educated refugees if assistance for them is halted? If assistance is stopped, they will become terrorists or refugees in Europe. That is the

alternative unless the Council continues to support UNWRA until the crisis ends.

We stand ready to embark on the longest journey to the farthest places in the world in order to enjoy our rights but we will not move one inch if we are asked to forsake those rights. We will present any agreement reached with Israel to a general referendum among our people so as to respect democracy and strengthen legitimacy. We believe we are a democratic and civilized people. Therefore we will call a general referendum.

We knocked on your door today, Mr. President, as you preside over the highest international body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. We have presented our vision for peace. It is hoped that it will be received with wisdom and justice. We are ready to begin negotiations immediately in order to achieve the freedom and independence of our people — just like all other nations — as well as peace and security for everyone in our region and the world, so that future generations can enjoy the benefits of that peace, following the enormous sacrifices made by our people. We recognize our martyrs, the wounded and the prisoners.

The Security Council is the highest world body. After the Council, we leave our issue in the hands of the Almighty, until Judgment Day. If justice for all people cannot be attained here, where should we go? Please help us. We call upon the Council to help us so that we do not commit acts that are at variance with our beliefs, those of the Council and the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank President Abbas for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I expected Mr. Abbas to stay with us and have a dialogue. Regrettably, once again he has run away. Look what just happened in this room. Mr. Abbas entered, put his demands on the table and left. He expects the Security Council to deliver the result. It will not work that way. The only way to move forward is through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

It is unfortunate that we are meeting here today. For the past seven and a half years, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, has refused to meet even once with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He has refused to negotiate peace. Yet, during that same time, Mr. Abbas has made seven trips here to the United Nations. Today, once again, rather than driving just 12 minutes between Ramallah and Jerusalem, he has chosen to fly 12 hours to New York to avoid the possibility of peace. Mr. Abbas has made it clear with his words and actions that he is no longer part of the solution; he is the problem.

What has he done to improve the life of a single person in Ramallah or Gaza? The Palestinians need leadership that will invest in education, not glorify violence. They need leadership that will build hospitals, not pay terrorists. They need leadership that will negotiate with Israel, speak to us and not run away from dialogue.

Mr. Abbas just addressed the members of the Security Council and spoke about his commitment to peace. That is what he often does when speaking in international forums. But when he addresses his people in Arabic, he conveys a very different message. A few weeks ago when Mr. Abbas spoke to the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council, he called the national movement of the Jewish people "a colonialist project that has no connection to Judaism". In that same shameful speech, he had the audacity to accuse Jews of supporting anti-Semitism in order to promote Zionism. It was not the first time he used such hateful language. In September 2015, as part of his attempts to delegitimize the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, he stated that "the Jews have no right to the Temple Mount and other holy sites. The Jews desecrate them with their filthy feet". He then went on to incite his people to violence, saying, "we welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem".

Mr. Abbas inspires a culture of hate within Palestinian society. He names schools and public squares in honour of terrorists. He encourages Palestinian children to hate by teaching them in school that Jews are descendants of apes. Just this month, his Fatah faction praised the terrorists who killed Rabbi Raziel Shevach, and he remained silent and refused to condemn the terrorists who killed a father of six as he was driving home to see his children.

Mr. Abbas's incitement does not end with rhetoric. He has made it official Palestinian policy to sponsor terrorism. In 2017, he spent $345 million to pay terrorists for killing innocent Israelis. That is 50 per cent of the total foreign aid donated to the Palestinian Authority — 50 per cent of its money — which is money

he could have spent building 40 hospitals. That is money he could have used to build 172 schools — every year.

His travels around the world to seek international intervention are an attempt to avoid the hard choices necessary for peace. He looks to every possible forum because he does not want to actually negotiate with Israel.

It is unfortunate, but this reckless behaviour by Chairman Abbas is nothing new. It is a pattern set throughout over 70 years of missed opportunities by Palestinian leadership whose spirit he continues to embody. We recently celebrated 70 years since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II). For the Jewish people, it represented international recognition of our historic rights to our homeland. We accepted the resolution immediately. It was not perfect. It did not provide us with all that we deserved. But it gave us hope for a better future. Yet, this past November, as Israel celebrated this milestone, the Palestinians marked the anniversary with grief and mourning, just as they did 70 years ago when they chose to reject it. Since that moment in 1947, Israelis valiantly fought in too many wars against enemies intent on destroying our country.

Over time, brave leaders emerged in Egypt and Jordan — leaders who were willing to negotiate, compromise and ultimately sign peace agreements with Israel. But the Palestinian leadership continued to choose conflict over coexistence. At the Camp David summit, in 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak presented the Palestinians with an unprecedented offer. What was Mahmoud Abbas's reaction? He chose to side with Yasser Arafat, claim it was a trap and reject the proposal. That was back in 2000.

In 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected to chair the Palestinian Authority. The world hoped he would follow in the courageous footsteps of President Sadat and King Hussein, seek peace with Israel and forge a better future for Palestinians. But he let his people down. Since the day he took office, peace plan after peace plan has been accepted by Israel and rejected by Mr. Abbas. Time and again, Israeli leaders have sat with Mr. Abbas — three different Israeli Prime Ministers, three different American Presidents — but every time an inch towards progress is made, Mr. Abbas runs away.

In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered the most generous deal since resolution 181 (II): an almost complete withdrawal from Judea and Samaria and a direct link to the Gaza Strip. The offer even included a plan to place the Old City of Jerusalem, the gateway to our holiest sites, under international control. Mr. Abbas's response was simple: an unequivocal no.

Two years later, Prime Minister Netanyahu did something unprecedented. In an attempt to restart negotiations, he initiated a 10-month freeze on Jewish construction in Judea and Samaria. That was a precondition to which no Israeli Prime Minister, not even Yitzhak Rabin or Shimon Peres, had ever agreed. But soon enough, the 10 months passed, and Mahmoud Abbas was nowhere to be found. He never came to the table.

In 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry opened another attempt at negotiations. Once again, Prime Minister Netanyahu was ready to talk and negotiate. Once again, Chairman Abbas responded by breaking his commitment to Secretary Kerry. He chose the unilateral action of joining international conventions. Then he sought peace with Hamas, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, without even demanding that it renounce violence.

Today, as we speak, the current United States Administration is once again working very hard to make progress towards peace. Mr. Abbas, however, is once again looking hard for an excuse. This time he claims it was the American announcement about Jerusalem that drove him to reject negotiations. By recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, President Trump simply stated what should be clear to everyone.

Let me be clear. For thousands of years Jerusalem has been the heart and soul of our people. Jerusalem has been our capital since the days of King David. And Jerusalem will remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel forever. We will always insist on Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem. But even fair-minded observers would agree that, under any possible agreement, Jerusalem will be recognized internationally as our capital.

After all these years of Abbas's rejectionism, one thing is very clear: when we extend a hand, Abbas extends a fist. Only when the terrorists of Hamas extend a hand does Abbas embrace them with open arms and without preconditions. Mr. Abbas has not even insisted on the basic human gesture of demanding the return of the Israeli civilians and the remains of Israel Defense Forces soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, savagely being held by Hamas.

Israelis are an optimistic people. We weathered four bloody wars with Egypt while waiting for a leader like Anwar Sadat to courageously visit Jerusalem. It took decades of talks with Jordan until the time was right for King Hussein to enter into what he rightly called a peace of the brave.

Three times a day Jews in Israel and all over the world turn to Jerusalem and pray for peace. We ask the following from God:

> "Grant peace, goodness and blessing, grace, loving-kindness and mercy to us and unto all Israel and all of the world."

We have no doubt that the day will come when the Palestinian people will also be blessed with leadership that shares these noble aspirations. This will be a leadership that condemns violence and ends the shameful practice of paying salaries to terrorists. It will be a leadership that educates its people on tolerance instead of peddling anti-Semitism. It will be a leadership that recognizes that Israel is and always will be the national homeland of the Jewish people.

Israel eagerly awaits the day when such a Palestinian leadership will emerge and bring hope for a better future for its people and our region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for being with us today as well as Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

We are meeting today in a forum that is very familiar to all of us. This meeting on the Middle East has been taking place each month for many, many years; its focus has been almost entirely on issues facing Israelis and Palestinians, and we have heard many of the same arguments and ideas over and over again. We have already heard them again this morning.

It is as if saying the same things repeatedly without actually doing the hard work and making the necessary compromises will achieve anything. Beginning last year we have tried to broaden the discussion, and we have had some success in doing so. I thank my colleagues who have participated in those broader discussions. One reason we did that is our well-founded belief that the United Nations spends an altogether disproportionate amount of time on Israeli-Palestinian issues.

It is not that those issues are unimportant. They are certainly very important. The problem is that the United Nations has proved itself time and again to be a grossly biased Organization when it comes to Israel. As such, the disproportionate focus of the United Nations has actually made the problem more difficult to solve by elevating the tensions and the grievances between the two parties.

Another reason we have attempted to shift the discussion is that the vast scope of the challenges facing the region dwarf the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As we meet here today, the Middle East is plagued by many truly horrendous problems. In Yemen, there is one of the worst humanitarian disasters on Earth, with millions of people facing starvation. Meanwhile militia groups fire Iranian rockets from Yemen into neighbouring countries.

In Syria, the Al-Assad regime is using chemical weapons to gas its own people. This war has taken the lives of more than half a million Syrians. Millions more have been pushed into neighbouring Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon as refugees, causing major hardships in those countries. In Lebanon, Hizbullah's terrorists exert ever more control, illegally building up a stockpile of offensive weapons, inviting a dangerous escalation that could devastate regional security.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham is engaged in an inhumane level of cruelty in much of the region. It has been dealt severe setbacks in Iraq and Syria, but it is not yet completely destroyed and still poses serious threats.

Egypt faces repeated terrorist attacks, and of course there is the terrorist-sponsoring regime in Tehran that initiates and encourages most of the troubles I have just outlined.

These immense security and humanitarian challenges throughout the region should occupy more of our attention rather than having us sit here month after month and use the most democratic country in the Middle East as a scapegoat for the region's problems. But here we go again.

I do not mean to suggest that there is no suffering in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides have suffered greatly. So many innocent Israelis have been killed or injured by suicide bombings, stabbings and other sickening terrorist attacks. Israel has been forced to live under constant security threats like virtually no

other country in the world. It should not have to live that way. And yet Israel has overcome those burdens; it is a thriving country with a vibrant economy that contributes much to the world in the name of technology, science and the arts.

It is the Palestinian people who are suffering more. The Palestinians in Gaza live under Hamas terrorist oppression. I cannot even call it a governing authority, as Hamas provides so little in the way of what one would normally think as Government services. The people of Gaza live in truly awful conditions, while their Hamas rulers put their resources into building terror tunnels and rockets. The Palestinians in the West Bank also suffer greatly. Too many have died, and too much potential has been lost in this conflict. We are joined here today by Palestinian Authority President Abbas. I am sorry he declined to stay in the Chamber to hear the remarks of others. Even though he has left the room, I will address the balance of my remarks to him.

When the new American Administration came into office last January, we did so against the fresh backdrop of the passage of resolution 2334 (2016). In the waning days of the previous American Administration, the United States made a serious error in allowing that resolution to be adopted. Resolution 2334 (2016) was wrong on many levels. I am not going to get into the substance now. But beyond the substance, perhaps its biggest flaw was that it encouraged the false notion that Israel can be pushed into a deal that undermines its vital interests, damaging the prospects for peace by increasing mistrust between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In the past year, the United States has worked to repair that damage. At the United Nations I have opposed the bias against Israel, as any ally should do. But that does not mean that I or our Administration is against the Palestinian people. Just the opposite is true; we recognize the suffering of the Palestinian people, as I have recognized it here today.

I sit here today offering the outstretched hand of the United States to the Palestinian people in the cause of peace. We are fully prepared to look to a future of prosperity and coexistence. We welcome President Abbas as the leader of the Palestinian people here today. But I will decline the advice I was recently given by his top negotiator, Saeb Erekat. I will not shut up; rather, I will respectfully speak some hard truths.

The Palestinian leadership has a choice to make between two different paths. There is the path of absolutist demands, hateful rhetoric and incitement to violence. That path has led and will continue to lead to nothing but hardship for the Palestinian people. Or there is the path of negotiation and compromise. History has shown that path to be successful for Egypt and Jordan, including the transfer of territory. That path remains open to the Palestinian leadership if only it is courageous enough to take it.

The United States knows the Palestinian leadership was very unhappy with the decision to move our embassy to Jerusalem. It does not have to like that decision. It does not have to praise it. It does not even have to accept it. But know this: that decision will not change.

So once again you must choose between two paths. You can choose to denounce the United States, reject the United States' role in peace talks and pursue punitive measures against Israel in international forums such as the United Nations. I assure you that path will get the Palestinian people exactly nowhere towards the achievement of their aspirations. Or you can choose to put aside your anger about the location of our embassy and move forward with us towards a negotiated compromise that holds great potential for improving the lives of the Palestinian people.

Putting forward old talking points and entrenched and undeveloped concepts achieves nothing. That approach has been tried many times and has always failed. After so many decades, we welcome new thinking. As I mentioned in the meeting held last month on this issue (see S/PV.8167), the United States stands ready to work with the Palestinian leadership. Our negotiators are sitting right behind me, ready to talk. But we will not chase after you. The choice is yours.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to express our appreciation to you, Sir, as President of the Security Council, to my colleagues on the Council and to everyone in this Chamber today for the tribute to the memory of Vitaly Ivanovich Churkin, the late Permanent Representative of Russia, exactly a year since he was unexpectedly and untimely taken from us. I thank you.

I would also like to express our sorrow and sympathy at the passing yesterday of our dear friend and colleague Mr. Necton Mhura, Permanent Representative of Malawi.

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, to the Council Chamber. We believe that the participation of the leader of Palestine in today's meeting is important to an understanding of the current situation in the Middle East. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his informative report on the situation regarding the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

The long-suffering region of the Middle East is being ripped apart by violent conflicts, in Syria, Yemen and Libya, all of them in themselves deeply critical. But it would be deluded to think that the Palestinian problem has now taken a back seat and an even greater mistake to put it there on purpose. Even today it is still the epicentre of the chronic instability in the Middle East. The situation in the area has recently deteriorated. In the absence of full-fledged political negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, the notorious recent decisions regarding Jerusalem have not only inflamed emotions and pushed the situation into another destabilizing cycle, they have intensified people's desperation. There have been demonstrations in the West Bank and Gaza and angry statements from the Palestinian leadership and the capitals of the Arab-Muslim world, all of which only confirm the sensitive significance of the problem of Jerusalem, the cradle of three monotheistic religions.

We believe that increasing the pace of Israeli settlement activity will undermine the prospects for achieving a two-State solution and that the policy should be ended. Ensuring the ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to do its work effectively is absolutely critical. We must never let the Palestinians find themselves in circumstances where they have nothing to lose, practically speaking, a situation that would fuel radicalism and has the potential to blow up the situation in the Palestinian territories and the entire region. Russia contributes regularly to the Agency's budget as well as giving the Palestinians bilateral assistance.

It bears repeating that the current status quo in this protracted conflict is incapable of producing a reliable, lasting and viable outcome. Only a settlement based on a two-State formula, presupposing the peaceful and secure coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel, will enable the crisis to be overcome and create the conditions for sustainable development and a road to peace. As the situation evolves, Russia will continue its efforts to maintain the architecture of the Middle East settlement and to lead the political process out of its current depressed state. The priority task right now is achieving an immediate resumption of direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on a generally recognized international legal basis, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We firmly believe that the Middle East Quartet still has the full potential to be a unique mediation format, approved by the Council's resolutions. There should be no question that the group of four mediators, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, is capable of playing a role in unfreezing the political dialogue. The work of the Quartet, particularly its report of June 2016, has not lost its relevance. Implementing the report's recommendations will help to strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties. It discusses what to do about the settlement activity, the persistent provocative rhetoric and violence from both sides and other factors, as well as the imperative of ensuring that the Palestinians achieve genuine national unity based on the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We support activating this mechanism and its regular and thorough collaboration with the League of Arab States and all the regional and global stakeholders that are capable of helping to overcome the dangerous impasse in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. We particularly welcome Egypt and Jordan's efforts in that regard. Our Egyptian partners' mission to unite the Palestinians' ranks continues to be vital.

Getting new developments with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict requires considering how the international community will support the process so as to create the conditions for direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel. A direct dialogue on settling all final-status issues is a given in the Middle East peace process equation. We must focus on developing a formula acceptable to both sides. We are ready to discuss its parameters with all global and regional stakeholders. As we all know, the last two weeks in Russia have seen numerous contacts conducted at the highest level, including visits by King Abdullah II of Jordan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Abbas. We reaffirm our willingness to provide a platform in Russia for a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli leaders, without preconditions. We expect the proposal will receive a positive response from both sides.

We would like to emphasize that achieving a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, as with the resolution of other regional problems, will require joint efforts and collective and mutually respectful cooperation. All efforts to lay blame, groundless accusations and insulting rhetoric must be left behind, forever part of the past. We must rather activate channels for dialogue where we can discuss ways for resolving these difficult problems. The measures for confidence-building and security for the entire Middle East that we have long proposed still remain on the agenda.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for their important and informative briefings, and to welcome the presence here of President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine and the courageous and constant commitment to peace and negotiations that he has reaffirmed before the Council today.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just one more crisis among all the crises rocking the Middle East. It is the oldest conflict in the region and one whose symbolic dimension, historical depth and regional reverberations transcend the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories. And lastly, it is a conflict whose centrality and dynamics have always given terrorist groups active in the region and beyond grounds for recruitment. Now, almost a quarter of a century after the Oslo Accords, the prospects for peace continue to diminish both on the ground and in discussions and minds. During that time, the new generation of Palestinians and Israelis that has grown up has seen the hopes for a settlement of the conflict recede. In that regard, there are some who may be tempted to turn everything upside down, particularly by transforming a political disagreement that seeks compromise into a religious conflict where no concessions are possible. We should be very conscious of the risk of that happening.

We cannot ignore the fact that in reality the so-called status quo on the ground is deteriorating every day, thanks in part to colonization and more generally to Israel's occupation. It is also marked by violence, which continues to be used and encouraged by several movements, including Hamas, in a situation that may degenerate and lead to uncontrollable regional consequences at any time. The risk of escalation is particularly evident in Gaza, which is my first point and which the news of the past few days compels me to make. Recent incidents, against a background of humanitarian and economic crises in the Gaza Strip, increase the risk of a new conflict like the three Gaza experienced over the past decade. In order to avoid new violence, whose primary victims would be the people of Gaza, we call on everyone to exercise restraint. I want to reiterate that we will never compromise on Israel's security and reiterate our strong condemnation of the attacks perpetrated on Israel's territory — be they the use of explosives, the indiscriminate rocket fire that has recently resumed, or the digging of offensive tunnels such as that which has just been destroyed by Israeli forces.

Beyond the urgently required de-escalation, there can be no lasting solution for Gaza without the return of the Palestinian Authority under the authority of Mahmoud Abbas and within the framework of the principles endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization. In that regard, we reiterate our commitment to the implementation of the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October 2017 by Fatah and Hamas, which should enable the Palestinian Authority to fully exercise its prerogatives in the Gaza Strip, including in the area of security. That process must result in a rapid improvement of the living conditions of the people in Gaza and must also be accompanied by a lifting of the blockade, as well as credible security guarantees for Israel. France stands ready to support those efforts.

Finally, we must not separate the situation in Gaza from the Palestinian question as a whole. Gaza is an integral part of the Palestinian territories, and there can be no Palestinian State or viable peace agreement with Israel without Gaza. Palestinian unity is therefore essential to peace in the Middle East.

My second point concerns the conflict as a whole. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest of the conflicts that are tearing apart the Middle East and the only one whose solution is also widely known and shared. This solution is based on the principle of two States living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders; borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed exchanges of territories; Jerusalem as the future capital of those two States; and a concerted, realistic and fair solution for Palestinian refugees. Any negotiations must be based on internationally agreed parameters, which themselves are based on international law and the resolutions of the Council. These parameters are not optional, but rather the very framework for negotiations. We know very well that the fate of the Israelis and the Palestinians are

connected. Neither of the two peoples will sustainably achieve their national aspirations at the expense of the other. Today we are at a crossroads, at a critical moment when each of the parameters I have just listed has been weakened.

With regard to the 1967 lines, the settlement of Palestinian territories and all the accompanying legislative and administrative measures are trying to impose another reality on the ground and to implement a project that is incompatible with the two-State solution. If we are not careful, that solution will disappear like a mirage in the desert. After a record year for settlement in 2017, there have already been announcements of some 1,800 housing units this year. The position of France is clear. We condemn settlement activity in all its forms. It is illegal under international law, as recalled in resolution 2334 (2016). It is also dangerous, since it destroys on the ground the possibility of two States and undermines trust between the parties.

With regard to the issue of Jerusalem, the status of the city can be determined only by the parties themselves within the framework of a peace agreement. Under such a future agreement, the city is destined to become the capital of two States, Israel and Palestine. In the absence of agreement, we do not recognize any sovereignty over Jerusalem. We therefore do not agree with any announcement that deviates from the international consensus and relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 478 (1980). Similarly, we regret the adoption early this year of an Israeli law on Jerusalem that will make it much more difficult to share Jerusalem as part of a future peace agreement.

Finally, the situation of the Palestinian refugee camps is a time bomb in Gaza — I will not dwell on this — and throughout the region. As long as a realistic and fair solution for refugees remains out of reach, the provision of basic services by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees will be essential. This is a humanitarian imperative, in particular in areas such as medical assistance and food supplies. It is also a question of human development, in particular when it comes to UNRWA's network of schools, and an imperative for the security and stability of the region. The situation in Lebanon is particularly worrying in this respect.

Let us be clear. The weaker UNRWA becomes, the more terrorist groups can use Palestinian refugee camps as breeding grounds for recruitment. In the name of humanitarian requirements, but also realism and our security interests, we call on the United States not to give up the historic and vital role it plays with regard to UNRWA. At the same time, all current and potential donors should renew their efforts to promote UNRWA as a unique tool for regional stabilization.

I have recalled the main parameters for a solution to the conflict, which are based on the Council's resolutions. My third and last point is: How can we contribute on this basis to a resumption of negotiations? We acknowledge the commitment of the United States, whose role is essential, to fostering a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a final-status agreement. We hope the American proposals will be within the framework agreed by the international community, as recalled by President Emmanuel Macron when he met with Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas in December 2017. Our authorities intend to remain in close contact with the parties in order to contribute to the preservation of the possibility of two States on the ground and the resumption of negotiations.

With regard to methodology, we welcome the proposals made today by President Abbas and are open to exploring the development of the ways in which the international community can support the peace process. France has been reflecting on that for a long time. That is what motivated our initiative leading to the Paris conference on 15 January 2017, at which more than 70 countries renewed their agreement on the parameters for peace and the idea that Israelis and Palestinians should themselves create a lasting solution through negotiations. Such a development is intended not to undermine the role of the United States, whose commitment to supporting the peace process is indispensable, but to make it possible for the actors who can play a constructive role with the parties to more easily join together, on the basis of the international parameters I have described, in order to help the parties to resume and successfully carry out the peace negotiations. In that regard, regional actors would play a crucial role by offering, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, the prospect of full regional normalization for Israel in the wake of a peace agreement. Similarly, Council members should provide their support.

In the difficult context I have just described, I want to solemnly reiterate that there is no viable alternative to the two-State solution. A single State would lead to two parallel citizenship regimes in the same territory, thereby creating an unequal situation that would be unacceptable in principle and catastrophic in its consequences. Such a situation would represent a double impasse. For the Palestinians, it would mean the abandonment of their aspirations for statehood; for the Israelis, it would mean the demise of their national democratic project.

If there is one urgent need today, it is to offer Israelis and Palestinians a political future by actively working to restore hope for two States and the possibility of negotiations between the parties. France, because it is a friend of both Israelis and Palestinians, intends to play its full role nationally and with its international partners.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for their, as always, detailed but sobering briefings to the Security Council. I want to say too that we fully support the work on the ground of Mr. Mladenov and his team and the work that they do every day to search for peace in the Middle East.

We were also pleased to see President Abbas in the Chamber today and to hear his message.

For many years, we have spoken about the Middle East peace process as being at a crossroads. This statement has never been more accurate than it is today. And at every crossroads there is a choice to be made. At this moment in time, there are a number of worrying developments in terms of the choices we see being made. Accelerated illegal settlement expansion, harmful Israeli legislative measures, resurgent violence including rocket attacks, the grave and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza — which we dealt with in detail last week — and a threat to the specific status of Jerusalem, as it is embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), are among the many examples. At the same time, our commonly agreed destination is as clear as ever. It is two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In order to contribute to the two-State solution, we must acknowledge the fundamental root cause of the conflict, which the occupation. If we are to be able to reach a sustainable peace, humanitarian, economic and political actions are all needed, but their full engagement will not suffice if the illegal occupation of Palestine does not end. As we work on the steps ahead, this perspective must be kept in mind. Sweden remains fully committed to the two-State solution, based on international law, known parametres and relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Respect for international law and United Nations resolutions remains at the core of the peace process. It is therefore more important than ever to be principled and to base our decisions and actions on international law. The Council is central to upholding the rules-based system, and the debate tomorrow will also focus on the significance of this system and respect for the Charter of the United Nations. The aim remains two States living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both. That is also the policy of the European Union. There is no alternative, and that is why no action should be taken that prejudges the final-status issues. Such issues can be taken off the table only as part of negotiations between the parties. That includes Jerusalem and refugees. In this regard, the Council has a duty to uphold its resolutions on the special status of Jerusalem.

We were pleased to see President Abbas in the Security Council today, as I said earlier. Sweden recognized Palestine in 2014 and fully supports Palestinian state-building. For sustainable progress, efforts towards the re-establishment of Palestinian Authority control in Gaza and intra-Palestinian reconciliation are crucial, as are continued efforts to strengthen inclusive and democratic institutions and processes in Palestine.

As Special Coordinator Mladenov said, the peace process needs to be inclusive in order to advance and achieve sustainable results. Women's fair representation and full and meaningful participation in the peace process is a prerequisite for progress. The younger generations must also be included and given hope of a better future and an alternative to the current situation. The private sector also has a role to play. In both Palestine and Israel, civil society plays a crucial role in advancing peace. That is why Sweden engages closely and widely with civil society, in particular women's groups and youth, in both countries.

As previously stated, including in the Council last week, a significant reduction of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is deeply worrisome and

must be urgently and sustainably resolved. Failure to resolve the funding situation will have serious humanitarian and security consequences in the region. For that reason, Sweden has already made our payment of $59 million for 2018 to UNRWA, and we urge others to step up their funding, including by making their payments as early as possible. Furthermore, Sweden, Jordan and Egypt, together with UNRWA and the Secretary-General, have decided to co-host a ministerial conference in the spring on the Agency's pressing financial situation.

We are indeed at a crossroads. Our final destination — the two-State solution — is getting further away by the day. The political and even physical space for a two-State solution is drastically shrinking. The choices that we all make — Israelis, Palestinians and as members of the Council — will determine where we end up. The Council also has a responsibility to act, including by supporting the parties in moving from words to action. Difficult choices need to be made. What is needed now is political leadership and courage to make the bold choices and pick the right path to break the long-term deadlock and restart a genuine peace process. Only that way can we reach our commonly agreed final destination.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation offers its gratitude for and welcome to the presence of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, to whom I offer our deepest respect and admiration.

I also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We further commend the initiative of the presidency of Kuwait for organizing this important meeting.

Bolivia comes to this important meeting, the second of 2018 on this issue, with great concern, as every day we continue to see the suffocation of the people of Palestine by Israel through expansionist and colonialist policies that violate international law and the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. It is necessary and critical to recall that, while there are two parties to this conflict, they are not of equality status. One of those parties, Israel, is the occupying Power; the other, Palestine, is an occupied people. This is a historical and glaring inequality. One of the parties has used and uses force to occupy the territory of another. One of the parties has built a wall that, according to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, constitutes a violation of international law. One of the parties builds illegal settlements in the territory of the other. One of the parties displaces civilians by force, confiscates land, demolishes housing and transfers settlers to illegally built settlements. One of the parties has imposed a blockade on Gaza, with terrible humanitarian consequences, including limited access to basic services. One of the parties is responsible for the existence of 5 million Palestinian refugees. One of the parties appropriates the water and agricultural land resources of the other. One of the parties has unleashed a brutal military campaign against the Palestinian people. One of the parties commits serious violations of human rights and may have committed crimes of war. One of the parties forcibly displaces Palestinian civilians. One of the parties shirks its international obligations and systematically violates the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

For example, Gaza is currently suffering electricity blackouts of up to 16 hours a day, and there is a severe shortage of drinking water, medicines and basic supplies. Fuel reserves are running dry. These facts have dreadful repercussions, such as the closure of hospitals and the possible collapse of basic services, in addition to the likelihood of a cholera outbreak. The situation is alarming, and even more so now that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA), which provides humanitarian assistance to more than 1 million people in Gaza, is facing a financial crisis that is undermining its response capacity. In that regard, we express our concern about the announced cuts in UNRWA funding, a measure that is no more than a manifest way to politicize the dignity and human security of nearly 5 million Palestinian refugees. We welcome the initiative of Sweden, among other States, to convene a ministerial conference to address that important and urgent matter.

For 50 years, Israeli policies of dispossession, occupation and discrimination have heightened the suffering of the Palestinian people. In January alone, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 32 Palestinian structures in the West Bank — approximately the same number of structures as the monthly average of 2017. Thirty-seven persons were displaced and another 82 were affected as a result. In other words, we must speak not of a status quo in the situation of

the occupied Palestinian territories, but of an ongoing and continuous augmentation of the occupation, rendering the possibility of attaining a two-State solution increasingly difficult. We believe that those who suffer the most as a result of those policies are the most vulnerable faction of the population, which is comprised of women, older people and children. In that regard, we express our concern about the more than 300 children who have been detained in recent months by Israel's security forces.

As Mr. Mladenov mentioned, we want to draw attention the case of the young girl Ahed Tamimi, who has become a symbol of the Palestinian resistance. Ahed's story is not just about a girl, but rather thousands of youth over decades of occupation. Ahed has borne witness to the violence and injustice that her people endure on a daily basis. She has watched her mother be arrested and her cousin fall into a coma after being shot in the face — both of them victims of Israeli forces. Ahed has felt the fear and hopelessness that other youth cannot even imagine at that age. She has experienced what no parent wants for their children. And despite that, she has demonstrated extraordinary strength and bravery. Israel, a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the only country in the world that tries children before military courts. We express our solidarity with Ahed Tamimi's family and we are awaiting her prompt release.

Bolivia, as a pacifist country, believes in a unique approach to ensuring fair and lasting peace in the conflict between Israel and Palestine — one based on dialogue and negotiations, with clear political will demonstrated by both parties in order to achieve the two-State solution. For that reason, we reaffirm our full commitment to multilateralism and respect for international law, and we reiterate our support for all international efforts that lead to a peaceful solution to the conflict, such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, among others that are dedicated to entrenching fair and lasting peace, allowing both peoples to live within secure and recognized borders.

We are convinced that the only long-term option to solve the conflict is the two-State solution, where, ultimately, a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State would be established with the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that regard, we reiterate our emphatic condemnation of the decision made by the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, since it constitutes a flagrant violation of various Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 478 (1980), which references the withdrawal of States' diplomatic posts from the city. That decision only subverts any possibility of dialogue between the parties and disproportionately moves away from any peaceful solution.

In concluion, we believe that now is the time for multilateralism and for the Security Council to assume its historic responsibility entrusted to it by Charter of the United Nations. Once again, we refuse to believe that this building and the Council have become an occupied territory in a colonized land. Nelson Mandela, who was included on the United States terrorist list until 2008 said that "we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians".

Mr. Tleuberdi (Kazakhstan): Our delegation appreciates the presence of President Mahmoud Abbas in the Chamber and His Excellency's statement to the members of the Security Council. We also thank the Secretary-General for his remarks, and Special Coordinator Mladenov for the latest update.

As a member State of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Kazakhstan shares concerns regarding the future of the two-State solution, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) funding deficit and the need for the international community to lead the Middle East peace process.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process remains unchanged. My country urges the parties to maintain the historical status quo of Jerusalem, in accordance with previously reached international agreements. My delegation therefore endorses the statement of Secretary-General António Guterres that the question of the final status of Jerusalem must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties. It should be achieved on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. At the same time, the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides should be taken into account.

We support negotiations that result in the two-State solution, and we stand for their early resumption, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. The ultimate goal should be

the restoration and promotion of the peace process, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Kazakhstan declares its support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self- determination and the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent State within its international borders pre-1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace with Israel. At the same time, we emphasize the right of Israel to security. We also propose restoring trust and utilizing the confidence-building measures with a three-fold approach, namely, the promotion of a security-development nexus, a revamped regional approach and a more enhanced, coordinated and transparent modus operandi of the United Nations in the wider region, delivering as one United Nations.

We note that the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza, which further contributes to instability and frustration, could lead to the resumption of conflict and increase of terrorist activities. In that regard, we urge the official authorities of Israel and Palestine to help resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. That requires confidence-building measures with an economic dimension, with support from the international community.

Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed by the Special Coordinator over the funding of UNRWA this year. A significant reduction of its regular budget has already increased the anxieties of the 5.3 million Palestinian refugees, who have already suffered at the hands of the longest protracted refugee crisis. Kazakhstan also expresses great concern over the growth of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories. All United Nations resolutions in that regard have been an important step to bring about a cessation of settlement activities and prevent violence against civilians.

We also call upon the leaders of Israel and Palestine to take concrete steps that will preserve the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the two States and strengthen the prospects for peace based on the inalienable right of Palestinians to statehood and Israel's right to security, as we mentioned before, and recognition. Kazakhstan welcomes the United States diplomatic efforts in resuming the peace process and talks with the leaders of both countries, which United States President Trump held in Washington, D.C., in recent days.

We call on the Middle East Quartet to revive the work on the Palestinian-Israeli track in the context of United States efforts in that direction. We also welcome the efforts of the Russian Federation and Egypt to ensure intra-Palestinian unity and urge all Palestinian political parties and movements to integrate into one national political structure. Kazakhstan believes it is necessary, in the very near future, to begin negotiations on each existing problem, with a view to reaching an agreement on pending issues and giving them a so-called final status. Only such an approach would lead to the adoption of a basic treaty.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the President, the Secretary-General and Mr. Mladenov. I would like to welcome President Abbas and thank him for his address to the Security Council. I welcome his stated commitment to non-violence and to engaging constructively towards the two-State solution.

The United Kingdom remains committed to a two-State solution that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we will support all and any efforts to that end. Our long-standing goal is a negotiated peace settlement that leads to a safe and secure Israel, living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with secure and recognized borders and with Jerusalem as a shared capital of both States.

United States leadership on this issue is indispensable to achieving a solution that meets the aspirations of both parties, and we look forward to the announcement of peace proposals when the United States Administration judges them to be ready. United States efforts offer a significant opportunity to deliver peace, and they should be supported and encouraged by all. We stand ready to provide political and practical support to help achieve a viable agreement. We encourage the parties to make a public commitment to renewed peace negotiations based on a two-State solution. In order to move forward, it is important that they reaffirm their commitment to all previous diplomatic agreements, which have taken us closer to peace. Those agreements remain an important basis for renewed talks. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's continued recognition of the State of Israel and the parties continuing security cooperation.

If a peace process is to succeed, it needs to be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We

regret that too many people continue to undermine efforts to achieve peace. We condemn the detonation of an improvised explosive device along the Gaza border with Israel on Saturday, which wounded four Israeli soldiers, including two seriously. We also condemn the recent terrorist attack in the West Bank settlement of Ariel. There is never an excuse for terror, and our thoughts are with the family and friends of the victim, as they are with all those who have been affected by violence. Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. There is also a right to dignity, and we condemn kidnappings, as well as acts that prevent families from being able to properly grieve for their loved ones.

We will continue to press all sides to refrain from engaging in or encouraging incitement to hateful action or language. That only serves to stir up prejudice and takes us further from the goal of achieving peace. In that regard, it is unacceptable for anyone to deny the legitimacy of the connection of either the Jewish or Palestinian peoples to the land. Inflammatory and unhelpful rhetoric on both sides weakens trust, corrodes mutual respect and undermines prospects for peace. We call on both parties to act with restraint and to show bold leadership. Only when both parties reject violence and work together to ensure calm and stability can peace have a chance to flourish.

We are concerned by the Israeli Government's recent decision to establish a settlement deep in the West Bank — the second in 12 months. Those plans have also raised the possibility of the retroactive legalization of the illegal outpost of Havat Gilad, and there have been renewed threats from Israel to demolish structures in Al-Susiya, in the occupied West Bank. We call on Israel to immediately reverse its policies of settlement expansion and demolitions. They undermine the physical viability of the two-State solution and call into question Israel's own commitment to peace.

The lack of Palestinian unity continues to be an impediment to achieving peace. We therefore support reconciliation efforts that lead to the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. As Special Coordinator Mladinov informed us last week, current conditions in the Gaza Strip are dire. Further deterioration of the humanitarian situation will not only continue to put lives at risk, but would represent a threat to stability in the region. It is essential that all parties work urgently to improve the situation, and we call for an easing of access controls for people and goods into an out of Gaza. The United Kingdom remains a committed supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It must be able to continue its vital work to improve the lives of Palestinian refugees and help maintain stability across the region. It needs appropriate funding to do so.

All United Nations States Members have a role to play in nurturing peace and rejecting violence. We are therefore concerned by incursions across Israel's border with Syria earlier this month. Our commitment to Israel's security is unwavering, and we support Israel's right to defend itself.

The United Kingdom's position on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement has not changed. It should be based on the lines as they stood on 4 June 1967, with equal land swaps to reflect the national security and religious interests of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Jerusalem should be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian States, and its status must be determined through a final-status agreement. A just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees is needed that is demographically compatible with the principle of two States for two peoples.

In conclusion, like everyone in the Council, the United Kingdom strongly supports peace. We want to see renewed peace negotiations, supported by the international community, that lead to a safe and secure Israel — the homeland for the Jewish people — living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State — the homeland for the Palestinian people. Let us all work together to lay the groundwork for peace.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting in order to hear the briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. We commend Mr. Mladenov for the excellent work that he is doing in the Middle East in the search for peace in that region. We welcome the President of the State of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and are grateful for his presence at this meeting. We also appreciate the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is optimistically following developments in Iraq, although it is very concerned about the current situation in Yemen and

Syria, and it expresses its deep concern about recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Accordingly, we express the full support of Equatorial Guinea for stabilizing and bringing peace to the region in general, and the situation between Israel and Palestine in particular.

Equatorial Guinea regrets the latest escalation of violent incidents and tensions between Palestinians and Israelis, as we just heard in Mr. Mladenov's briefing, and calls on all parties to act rationally and refrain from actions that could aggravate an already complex situation. The Government of Equatorial Guinea, led by His Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, always advocates for negotiated solutions to all conflicts and problems no matter how complex or intractable they might seem, and, with regard to the case at hand, our Government's stance is no different. We therefore call on all parties involved in the conflict to do their utmost to normalize the situation and alleviate the suffering of the people. The Government of Equatorial Guinea advocates for the two-State solution directly negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians, or within the framework of a multilateral mechanism. It is possible that such a solution might entail painful concessions for both parties, as the very nature of dialogue implies the ability and need to make concessions.

All negotiations must be conducted within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The final status of Jerusalem must be the consequence of such negotiations. Equatorial Guinea considers as just the historic claims of the Palestinian people, which have been validated by the various declarations by the African Union and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. But Israel's right to live in peace and security must also be taken into account. The parties should refrain from unilateral actions that could stymie dialogue.

We are deeply concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, as highlighted by Mr. Mladenov's briefing. Equatorial Guinea believes that the solution to the grave humanitarian crisis should be a priority for the international community, with the objective of improving the plight of the civilian population. We therefore commend Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on providing financial assistance to ease the humanitarian crisis. Nonetheless, it is not enough to resolve issues with health care, drinking water and electricity. Without those services, it is very difficult to provide medical assistance and a semblance of normalcy. We call for intra-Palestine dialogue to overcome differences. We believe it will have a positive impact on the quest for a just solution to the crisis.

In conclusion, we pay well-deserved tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its work, despite scarce resources, and call for the continued provision of international financial assistance to an agency whose humanitarian efforts are very noble and laudable.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing. We are also pleased to welcome President Mahmoud Abbas to today's meeting.

Poland strongly supports all initiatives aimed at stabilizing and strengthening peace and security in the Middle East. Regrettably, since our last briefing (see S/PV.8167), no significant positive moves towards achieving peace have been made. On the contrary, we cannot fail to notice that the situation has deteriorated.

We note with concern an increase in the number of incidents along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip — mortar rockets fired from the Strip and Israel's retaliatory measures, as well as growing tensions over Israel's northern border. We recognize Israel's right to defend itself and ensure the security of its citizens. At the same time, we urge all parties to exercise restraint in order to avoid further hostilities that would put large groups of the population at risk. Particularly worrying is the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, where we face a deep crisis with regard to life-saving health, water and sanitation services. The current shortages of fuel could soon aggravate the situation even further, depriving the inhabitants of Gaza of hope and real prospects and inciting inflammatory remarks that result in violence, extremism and radicalization, in particular among young people.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The effects of reducing support could lead to serious security and humanitarian consequences, not only in Palestinian territories but also in neighbouring countries that host Palestinian refugees. The Agency already faces great challenges in upholding its mandate

to preserve key services, such as education and health care. The international community, as a whole, cannot shirk its responsibility and obligations to Palestinian refugees. We must make every effort to ensure the smooth continuation of the Agency's work on a solid financial basis. For its part, for years, Poland has actively and regularly supported UNRWA and will maintain its support for Palestinian refugees through annual contributions to the Agency. In response to the current needs, Poland will contribute to UNRWA's general budget in the first quarter of the year.

I would like to add that a stable humanitarian situation in the entire Middle East region is a key priority for Poland. For that reason, in recent years, we have significantly increased our support for the most affected people in Syria, its neighbouring countries and the West Bank through bilateral and multilateral assistance, including the Polish contribution under the Economic Resilience Initiative last year.

In more general terms, let me underline that the Security Council must maintain its commitment to resolving one of the longest-standing conflicts on our agenda. We should continue to seek an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by reviving the peace process. Only a return to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, can provide positive input to the process. That is the only path towards a two-State solution and resolving all final-status issues. Poland supports a two-State solution under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including Palestine's right to self-determination and independence and Israel's right to ensure its security and normalization of relations with Arab States.

In line with the long-standing European Union position, we would like to reiterate our position on Jerusalem. We strongly believe that the aspirations of both parties with regard to Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way to resolve the status of Jerusalem must be found through negotiations.

We appeal to Israel and Palestine to refrain from unilateral steps that prejudge the outcome of final-status negations, and expect them to demonstrate their commitment to peace through their actions and policies. We condemn all acts of terrorism and incitement to violence. In our opinion, they constitute a significant obstacle to the reactivation of the peace process.

We continue to watch developments on intra-Palestinian reconciliation closely, and we call on all Council members to support that process in accordance with the Quartet principles. We believe that reaching an outcome accepted by the international community could be an important step for the unity of a future Palestinian State and may, in the long term, lead to a sustainable peace agreement. An important element of such a solution is the involvement of countries of the region. We should build on the relevance of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as a comprehensive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, thereby contributing to regional peace and security.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for attending today's meeting.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mladenov, for his informative briefing. China welcomes His Excellency President Abbas of Palestine at today's meeting and thanks him for his remarks.

The question of Palestine is the most protracted regional hotspot since the Second World War. It lies at the heart of the Middle East issue and is fundamental to achieving peace in the region. Only by establishing a genuine State of Palestine can Israel enjoy lasting security. Only a comprehensive settlement to the question of Palestine can bring about a fundamental shift in the situation in the Middle East. China is gravely concerned about the situation between Palestine and Israel, which remains tenuous, and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

All parties should faithfully implement resolution 2334 (2016), cease all settlement activities in the occupied territory and act to prevent further violence against civilians. All parties should remain calm, exercise restraint and move towards each other, thereby helping to foster the necessary conditions for the resumption of talks. We believe that a two-State solution represents the right way forward towards resolving the question of Palestine. The international community should uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, while jointly exploring ways and means to promote peace so as to achieve an early, comprehensive, just and durable solution to the question of Palestine.

The international community should offer guarantees regarding Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Parties with major influence on the Middle East should all play a constructive role in that regard. China remains committed to supporting and facilitating the Middle East peace process. We support the Palestinians establishing a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In July last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal to promote the resolution of the question of Palestine, calling for the advancement of the political process on the basis of the two-State solution, adherence to the philosophy of shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, greater coordination of international efforts to maximize synergy for peace, and a holistic approach for peace through development. Work is in full swing to implement that proposal. In December last year, China successfully hosted a symposium of Palestinian and Israeli pro-peace actors and will continue to push for a political settlement to the question in a constructive fashion.

The question of Jerusalem is complex and delicate, but it underpins the future solution to the question of Palestine. All parties should respect historical plurality, uphold fairness and justice, implement international consensus, strive for peaceful coexistence and act upon the relevant United Nations resolutions so as to reach a solution that accommodates all parties' interests through final-status negotiations. Palestine and Israel should respect each other's right to live and avoid any action that may aggravate the current situation.

The international community needs to continue providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and refugees, which can help improve the political, security and humanitarian situation there. Over the past six decades and more, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played an indispensable role in easing the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. We call upon all parties to scale up their support for UNRWA and countries hosting the Palestinian refugees so as to steadily improve the humanitarian conditions in which the refugees are living.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of today's meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and thanks the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for the quality of their comments and briefings on the subject under consideration. We also welcome the presence among us at this morning's debate of the President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, as well as the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel to the United Nations.

Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, hopes for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have dwindled, and the compromise solution of two States living side by side in peace and security seems increasingly to recede. This lack of political prospects has contributed to a serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation for the Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Given this alarming situation, my delegation is worried about a renewed outbreak of violence and confrontation, which would put at even greater risk the possibility of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. After the clashes of recent days that caused the deaths of two Palestinians and wounded Israeli soldiers, we therefore call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to exercise the utmost restraint.

My delegation continues to believe that peace between Palestinians and Israelis is still possible, despite the current impasse. My country remains convinced that there is no alternative to peace, which is why we call on the parties to the conflict to engage in constructive dialogue in order to overcome the obstacles. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the parties — for both sides — to renounce any unilateral initiative that could only jeopardize the chances of a political and peaceful settlement of the crisis.

We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our principled position in favour of a two-State solution as the only viable option to enable the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to live and coexist in peace and security. Côte d'Ivoire also believes that the final status of the City of Jerusalem must be negotiated as part of a mutually agreed solution between the two parties, as provided for in the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it should be recalled, are disastrous for the people living in the Gaza Strip, who have been faced with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, a high youth unemployment rate of up to 47 per cent, and shortages

of water and electricity. My delegation therefore calls for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, on the basis of enhanced cooperation, we encourage the Palestinian parties to continue to pursue dialogue with a view to achieving an effective return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, which would allow for a better handling of current humanitarian issues.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of today's meeting and welcome the presence among us this morning of the Secretary-General. We would also like to express our gratitude for Mr. Nickolay Mladenov's very detailed briefing. We particularly welcome the presence of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, and other sennior officials.

Peru follows the situation in Palestine with deep concern. The inflexibility of positions, the absence of dialogue between the parties and the unbroken stream of violent episodes have led to a stalemate in the peace process in the form of an unstable and unsustainable status quo. Against that backdrop, we stress the importance and urgency of a forging a basic framework of understanding that would help to reverse negative trends on the ground and favour the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties, with a view to achieving the only viable solution: two States living side by side with secure and mutually recognized borders. In that connection, we should remember the relevance and validity of the Oslo Accords, which provided the parameters necessary for such a solution, as well as the important role of the Quartet.

We consider it necessary, in the political, religious and social spheres, to act with respect, while also seeking to build mutual trust as a precursor to the resumption of constructive dialogue. Leaders on both sides are responsible for showing tangible restraint, a commitment to peace and respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

This leads me to recall the obligation to implement the resolutions of the Security Council. In particular, we deem it urgent to put an end to some practices that have been on the rise in the past year, that is, settlements, the demolition of homes and eviction, in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. All of this must stop, in line with resolution 2334 (2016). Moreover, we urge those parties directly involved to desist from, investigate and punish all violations of and international humanitarian law, all terrorists act and all attacks on civilians.

Tangible steps to this end must be taken. For example, information must be forthcoming on the plight of fallen or detained Israeli soldiers. We believe that the return of the remains of the fallen to their relatives would be an important gesture of humanity. By the same token, we believe that it is essential that the right to legitimate defence be invoked by the Israeli authorities legally and proportionally and in a careful manner. The human rights of Palestinian citizens, including minors, cannot be trampled upon.

In a similar vein, we also believe that it is crucial to reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity should be viewed as something precious, never as a threat.

We note with concern the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, described a few months ago by Secretary-General António Guterres himself as

> "one of the most dramatic humanitarian situations I have seen in many years working at the United Nations".

We deem it urgent to meet the basic needs of the people in Gaza. Poverty and marginalization are fertile breeding grounds for radicalization and violent extremism. It is important to promote sustainable peace, twinning humanitarian assistance with development plans that offer hope and opportunities to the youth.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is important to support the Agency and to endow it with stable and predictable financing. This leads me to hail the extraordinary meeting of the donors conference that took place in Brussels on 31 January, and I also hail the willingness stated by many countries to use their good offices and to contribute to alleviating the situation on the ground.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First let me welcome the presence earlier of President Abbas here in the Council, and let me thank Mr. Mladenov for his detailed briefing and certainly for his efforts for peace.

The facts on the ground speak for themselves and leave little room for optimism. We face a growing

humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza, and we see a lack of possibilities for Palestinian development in the West Bank.

I will touch on three points in that context: first, the two-State solution and the need for tangible steps; secondly, the need for commitment and international support; and, thirdly, the situation in Gaza.

With regard to my first point, the two-State solution, it is worth recalling the Oslo accords, signed by President Abbas, who has always advocated a peaceful road towards a Palestinian State. The Oslo accords held the promise of two States within five years of their signing, in 1993. We are now in the twenty-fifth year since Oslo, and the obstacles to peace have only grown.

Oslo was not just a document; it was a vision. We remain firmly convinced that only the two-State solution, based on the borders of 1967, will lead to sustainable peace. We recall that a lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved on the basis of the relevant Council resolutions; the Madrid principles, including land for peace; the road map; the agreements previously reached by the parties; and the Arab Peace Initiative, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that clear parameters define the basis for negotiations, including on Jerusalem. These parameters are key elements of a successful outcome.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon both sides to translate their stated desire for peace into tangible steps, steps that build trust and contribute to the preservation of the possibility of the two-State solution, in line with resolution 2334 (2016). This requires a fundamental change in the developments on the ground, which continue to undermine the prospect of a two-State solution.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and the actions taken in this context, including continuous demolitions; plans leading to the forced transfer of Bedouin communities in the West Bank; the announcement that the Havat Gilad outpost would be legalized into a settlement; and legislative proposals that entail nothing less than annexation. Such actions and proposals are cause for serious concern.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands' position has not changed: settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-State solution and prospects for a lasting peace. At the same time, the continued violence, including the firing of rockets, as well as incitement, needs to stop.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply concerned by the escalation of violence in and around Gaza. Rocket attacks by militants from Gaza are unacceptable and need to stop. The leadership on both sides must work to prevent escalation.

Secondly, concerning the need for commitment and international support, the current lack of confidence between parties but also in tried formats for negotiations creates a dangerous vacuum. They cause both the Israeli and Palestinian populations to lose hope.

Worldwide examples of resolved conflicts show that negotiations do not start with trust, they start with courage and the political commitment to reach out, build bridges and create trust, taking people along step by step.

The international community can certainly help in providing a political horizon for the two-State solution, in line with relevant Council resolutions. The international community can support the parties to find a path back to the negotiation table. To this end, cooperation between the Quartet partners as well as regional players and with both parties is crucial.

We fully support the initiatives for the two-State solution taken by the High Representative of the European Union, working together with both parties, the other members of the Quartet and regional partners.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to play a constructive role, building on our good relations with both sides.

This brings me to my third point: Gaza. As others have said, the crisis in Gaza is growing rapidly. Unemployment is rising, and the economy is coming to virtual standstill. Gaza faces a lack of energy supply that affects all aspects of life, including the provision of water and the treatment of sewage. Almost none of the groundwater is now fit for human consumption, and raw sewage flows into the sea, polluting the water needed for desalination. The people of Gaza suffer

from insufficient access to adequate health care. In the words of the Secretary-General, Gaza will become unlivable by 2020.

But for many, it is hardly livable this very day. A growing number of people there are dependent on humanitarian aid, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as we all know, is the largest provider of this aid. The critical financial situation of UNRWA is undermining its ability to provide basic services to the people of Gaza. We are concerned that this negative forecast will lead to growing despair in Gaza. It will add to the unpredictability of the situation and increase the risk of instability in the other areas of operations of UNRWA. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that UNRWA is able to execute its mandate as given by the General Assembly.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon all stakeholders to put the needs of the population at the forefront in future decisions regarding Gaza.

The positive measures suggested by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels can lead to a significant improvement in living conditions. This includes the expansion of possibilities for trade and support for essential services such as water and energy. We therefore call upon all parties involved to live up to the commitments made. We call on the Palestinian Authority to proceed on the challenging path of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We support the efforts to restore unity between the West Bank and Gaza, and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza as the single, legitimate governing authority. The incidents over the weekend showed again the need for a political solution for Gaza.

In conclusion, I started by saying there was little cause for optimism. However, in the Middle East optimism is not so much a choice as it is a necessity. This conflict can be solved; the conflict must be solved. We should all work diligently and in concert to advance the two-State solution: the parties themselves, the region and the international community at large.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We would like, as always, to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his useful and comprehensive briefing on the most recent developments concerning the Middle East and Palestine. We have always benefited from his briefings. We were pleased and honoured to have had His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas with us this morning. We thank him for having been at this meeting and for sharing with us his thoughts and vision on the very critical issue at hand. We also thank Ambassador Danny Danon for having been at this meeting and for sharing with us the Israeli perspective.

We are very concerned about the lack of progress in the Israel-Palestinian peace process. The most recent developments have once again brought the Israeli-Palestinian dispute back to the fore, thereby underscoring the urgency of renewed commitment to the peace process without any further delay. It is also our conviction that there is also a need for honest and transparent readiness on the part of all those with the capacity to make a difference to help the two parties move towards mutual accommodation.

Of course, we are deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. The lack of funding for critical facilities has left many Palestinians without life-saving health, water and sanitation services. There is need for the mobilization of international support to avert a humanitarian disaster. All those who responded to the urgent appeal must be commended, but there is still a shortfall in funding and more needs to be done to ensure that Palestinians have access to life-saving basic services. It is our earnest hope that humanitarian needs will be protected from any temptation to politicize them.

What could be looked at together with this is the need to enable the Palestinian Authority to exercise full control over Gaza based on the Cairo agreement. We believe progress on this issue will not only improve the economic and humanitarian situation, but also advance Palestinian unity, which hopefully could provide impetus for the peace process, which now remains dormant. Although the signing of the Cairo agreement was very welcomed, not much progress has been made in terms of its implementation. That, coupled with access restrictions, continues to exacerbate the humanitarian situation. In that connection, we note the trilateral meeting held recently between the Special Coordinator, the Palestinian Prime Minister and the Israeli coordinator and the discussion held, among others, on facilitating critical humanitarian solutions and revitalizing the economy in Gaza.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been unambiguous, as well as very transparent. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-

determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State. That is also the position of the African Union, whose decision we have a responsibility to respect. Accordingly, Ethiopia fully supports the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that is not only in the best interests of both Israel and Palestine, but it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East region.

However, it seems to us self-evident that lately moves have been made and actions have been taken that might not contribute to making progress towards a resolution of the outstanding issues on the basis of the two-State formula. Those steps are not only increasing frustration and mistrust, but are also undermining the very viability of the two-State solution. Removing those long-standing obstacles is imperative in order to create the necessary conditions for progress in negotiations between the two parties to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution on the basis of mutual trust and a spirit of compromise that ensures Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations for statehood. That is what the situation calls for, and it is also in the best interests of the two parties as well as the international community as a whole.

Many have said that there is no plan B to the two-State solution. The Secretary-General repeated the same thing today. That cannot be contested. That is why we supported the call for the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, lasting and just solution. In that regard, we welcome the holding of the extraordinary session of the international donor group for Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which met in Brussels last month, bringing together the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as all other relevant partners for the first time in a while to discuss measures to speed up efforts that can underpin a negotiated two-State solution.

The resumption of negotiations requires the full support of all partners, and all should play their part for any meaningful progress to be achieved. In that context, it is incumbent upon the Council to discharge its responsibilities and support such efforts for the sake of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and peace in the broader Middle East region. No doubt, at the end of the day the responsibility for making progress toward lasting peace and mutual accommodation based on justice and fair play falls on the two parties.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I welcome the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres and thank him for participating in this important and historic meeting on a crucial issue that has occupied the attention of the international community for the past five decades, during which we have witnessed ongoing violations of international humanitarian law through the continued Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories. The occupation has been condemned and denounced in resolutions of the Security Council that call for it to be brought to an end. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing.

We are honoured by the participation of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas of the sisterly State of Palestine in today's meeting, under my country's presidency of the Security Council for this month. His participation was a valuable opportunity to listen directly to the protagonist of this just cause and to hear what the international community must do to honour its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in order to guarantee the right of peoples to self-determination.

Prior to assuming its non-permanent membership of the Security Council early this year, the State of Kuwait pledged to make every possible effort to support the Palestinian cause as the most important cause for Arabs and Muslims everywhere and one of the pillars of Kuwait's foreign policy. We remain firm in our principled commitment to shouldering the concerns and meeting the aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, by implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Israel, as the occupying Power, continues to place obstacles in the way of a process towards a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. On the basis of our duty and the common responsibility of Council members to maintain international peace and security, we must stress the implementation of the Council's resolutions, which are binding on all Member States, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. How can we ignore the fact that the occupation continues to flout the United Nations and

the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy? The occupation perpetrates physical violation of the provisions of international law that mediate international relations today.

The peace process in the Middle East has witnessed many milestones and international initiatives that have resulted in the adoption of many United Nations resolutions. However, failure to commit to these resolutions has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis confronting the defenceless Palestinian people and increased tensions in the region. That has had an impact on international security and stability, and we have witnessed the emergence of other crises in the region that affect us all, such as extremism and terrorism. These cannot be tackled without addressing the root cause and essence of the conflict — the Palestinian question.

We have all witnessed the repercussions of the recent decision on Jerusalem, which is hindering our efforts, jeopardizing the peace process and affecting the balance of the negotiating process. Because we are confident that the United States plays an important role in the peace process, we therefore call on it to work with the international community to compel Israel to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy and end its occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories, occupied since 4 June 1967, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by all Arab countries in Beirut summit of 2002, through a peaceful resolution that establishes the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the political will to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will help achieve that goal, because that historic resolution reaffirmed the most important legal principles linked to the Palestinian question, that is, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. Israel, the occupying Power, should strictly honour its commitments and legal responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

In addition to that, the resolution condemns measures to change the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. In resolution 2334 (2016), the Council also condemns Israeli settlement activity as an illegal, illegitimate and a blatant violation of international law, recognizing that it is a major obstacle to achieving the two-State solution and a comprehensive and lasting peace. Moreover, resolution 2334 (2016) also states that any changes in the border lines of 4 June 1967 will not be recognized by the Security Council, including changes to the legal and historic status of Jerusalem as one of the final-status issues.

Regrettably, more than a year has passed since that historic resolution was adopted, and it still has not been implemented. Worse yet, when the provisions of the resolution were violated, we witnessed unusual record levels of Israeli settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territory — be it the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing ones — and a blatant violation of resolution 2334 (2016), which led to the forced displacement of the land-owning Palestinian families. The State of Kuwait strongly condemns Israel's illegal and illegitimate policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and its ongoing violations of the inalienable rights of the our Palestinian brethren people.

I cannot fail to address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which we are following with great concern, given its dangerous consequences for the lives of 2 million Palestinians there, restricting the delivery of basic services, including health services. The blockade is unjust and we condemn yet again Israel's inhumane practices, which represent a grave violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. The blockade imposed on Gaza is an example of such a violation. I reaffirm that the State of Kuwait will spare no effort to stand by our Palestinian brethren people in all the occupied territories.

The State of Kuwait supports the request of Palestine to operationalize some international mechanisms, such as the Quartet, by expanding its membership to include Arab countries, adding more vitality to its work. We also support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the State of Palestine at the national and international levels to strengthen its sovereignty over Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian people expect the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, to honour their commitment to maintaining international peace and security. We reiterate our solidarity with and stand by the Palestinian people in defending their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historic and

unshakable right to Jerusalem, as guaranteed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We reaffirm that East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine. We call on all countries to recognize the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, we renew our call on all present to participate in the Arria Formula meeting, to be held in cooperation with a group of Security Council members, to discuss the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) following more than one year of its adoption and 50 years of the Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose 1.05 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8184

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8184th meeting

Tuesday, 20 February 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Sheikh Al Sabah	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tileuberdi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Clay
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Seventeenth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2018/40)

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017) (S/2018/42)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted

The situation concerning Iraq

Seventeenth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2018/40)

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017) (S/2018/42)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Iraq to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/40, which contains the seventeenth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013), as well as to document S/2018/42, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017).

I now give the floor to Mr. Kubiš.

Mr. Kubiš: This Security Council meeting is taking place just days after the Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, so generously co-hosted by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, thereby showing once again his and his country's commitment to the humanitarian, peace and development cause in the region and in the world. The Conference was attended by more than 70 Member States and international organizations and 2,000 private-sector companies. It mobilized nearly $30 billion to support reconstruction. That massive regional and international response is extraordinary proof of the continuous solidarity with, and confidence in, the Government and the people of Iraq. In his concluding remarks, the Secretary-General stated,

> "[i]n a world where unfortunately good news is scarce, and in the region where unfortunately we see many situations getting worse, the fact that Iraq is on the right track and the fact that the international community has shown its confidence in Iraq is a very important piece of good news."

As the security forces continue to clear out remnants of Da'esh, Iraq is increasingly focusing on the upcoming parliamentary elections on 12 May. Many Iraqi political forces decided to form cross-sectarian, cross-ethnic coalitions across the political spectrum. It is indeed essential that the elections will confirm the vision of Iraqis working together across the sectarian and ethnic divides in pursuit of the needed political, economic and social reforms based on the principles of citizenship with equal rights, justice and opportunity for all and good governance, devoid of the compromised quota system and corruption. Only a new Government, based on such approach, will guarantee the future of Iraq as a united, democratic, fully sovereign and independent federal State and as a factor of stability, cooperation and prosperity for its people and the region.

The Independent High Electoral Commission has steadily continued its preparations for the parliamentary elections. The Commission has registered 205 political parties, and 27 political coalitions have been approved to contest the elections. Yet a number of challenges remain. The voluntary and dignified return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), under conditions of safety and security, is an critical issue for the success and credibility of the elections. In the months ahead, the Government expects that as many as 2 million of the 2.5 million who are still displaced will return home. I am also encouraged by the decision of the Government to establish voluntary return committees with humanitarian representatives in each governorate to oversee the return process.

The Iraqi security forces providing an environment of security, which would enable voters to exercise their right to vote in safety, free from terror and fear of intimidation, is an overriding concern. Although Da'esh's so-called caliphate has been defeated, the terrorist organization and its sleeper cells, including among IDPs, continue to pose a threat. On 18 February, in the course of a counter-terrorism operation in Hawija and surrounding areas, a special force from the popular mobilization forces was ambushed and over 20 fighters were martyred.

In addition, the new electronic ballot counting system, including the customization and development of the software for results tabulation, continues to be a work in progress and requires accelerated support, including from the United Nations and other international partners, in order to ensure the envisaged enhanced integrity and credibility of the elections. Observation of the elections, both domestic and international, will be a vital component in fostering credibility and acceptance of the results. I strongly urge domestic observer groups, as well as the international community, to participate in observing the elections, and the international community in providing the necessary support. Credible and acceptable elections with high voter turnout, including in the liberated areas and in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, with specific measures to facilitate women's participation, will empower the new Government to implement reforms, improve accountability and promote inclusiveness and reconciliation among various components and groups in Iraq.

I am encouraged by the recent positive developments in relations between Baghdad and Erbil. Prime Minister Al Abadi confirmed days ago that the federal and regional Governments are in the final stages of negotiations with regard to some concrete areas that would address urgent needs and concerns of the people of the region, beginning with the payment of salaries and the re-opening of the airports in Erbil and Suleimaniyah. Such steps are urgently needed.

I commend the Iraqi federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government for their concerted efforts and strong coordination aimed at the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security. With elections looming, we urge Iraqi senior political leaders to broaden women's political space and appoint them to leadership positions within political parties, as well as ensure their meaningful participation in all electoral processes, including participating in negotiations leading to the Government's formation following the holding of national elections.

I welcome the Government's willingness to work with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting to develop an action plan to address violations committed against children in times of conflict. To that end, Prime Minister Al Abadi has endorsed the establishment of the national inter-ministerial senior committee for monitoring and reporting on children affected by the armed conflict.

The Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS) of the United Nations Development Programme has continued to scale-up its efforts to stabilize newly liberated areas of Iraq. The FFIS is now cleared to work in 31 of the more than 40 cities and districts that have been liberated by Iraqi security forces. Since we last reported to the Security Council (see S/PV.8112), 360 projects have either been completed or are under development, thereby bringing the total number of stabilization projects to 1,887. In Mosul alone, nearly 600 stabilization projects are under way.

Despite the strong support demonstrated by Kuwait and the commitment to its international and humanitarian obligations shown by Iraq, the full normalization of relations will take place only once all outstanding issues concerning Kuwaiti missing persons and property have been resolved. The Government of Iraq, in particular its Ministry of Defence, is making proactive efforts to re-animate the search for missing Kuwaiti persons. I deeply regret that the past 13 years have not yielded tangible results. During the latest meeting of the tripartite mechanism, which took place on 6 February in Kuwait, tripartite members meaningfully acknowledged the review project of the International Committee of the Red Cross that would serve to streamline and prioritize work, re-orient activities and guide the mechanism.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on the international community to consider ways in which it could support the search for missing Kuwaiti persons, including through the procurement of field equipment and providing forensic, DNA and anthropological training and capacity-building for the Iraqi and Kuwaiti technical teams. Those Member States in possession of satellite imagery from 1990-1991 are particularly encouraged to come forward and provide analysis and information that could help in identifying burial sites to the Government of Iraq. I also reiterate my call on Iraq and Kuwait to come to an agreement on the swift repatriation of located Kuwaiti academic textbooks that have been awaiting an official handover for more than a year.

In conclusion, allow me to take this opportunity to thank my outgoing Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who is also Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq and Resident

Representative of the United Nations Development Programme, Ms. Lise Grande, for the truly outstanding work in her over three years in Iraq. When we praise major achievements in the areas of stabilization and when we applaud the hard work and significant outcomes achieved in the humanitarian area, including the civilian-military cooperation that succeeded so well in the protection and for the benefit of the affected civilian population, notably during the Mosul liberation campaign, we need first of all to recognize the leadership and achievements of Deputy Special Representative Grande, who, together with her colleagues, made it happen.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Kubiš for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait.

First of all, I would like to highly commend the efforts of the United Nations in assisting the Government and the people of Iraq at such a sensitive and difficult juncture, in particular following the liberation of all Iraqi territories from Da'esh. I also thank the United Nations for its work and coordination through the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) with the Iraqi Government pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017). I reiterate as well Kuwait's support for Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMI, and his Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs in Iraq, Ms. Alice Walpole. We also appreciate the work of her predecessor, Mr. Busztin.

I once again congratulate the Government and the people of Iraq on their historic victory in liberating their territories from Da'esh. At the same time, we highly commend the sacrifices of our brotherly Iraqi people, which embody the ideal of heroism in combating terrorism. We hope that the Iraqi Government will successfully hold accountable perpetrators of these criminal acts, in coordination and cooperation with the international mechanism pursuant to resolution 2379 (2017), in order to strengthen the country's relevant national judicial capacities.

We recognize the challenges facing Iraq following the defeat of Da'esh. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah called for holding an international conference on the reconstruction of Iraq, which took place in Kuwait last week. It was co-hosted by Kuwait, the Republic of Iraq, the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank, and aimed at helping Iraq overcome its current sensitive and critical phase. Pledges at the conference amounted to almost $30 billion from participating States, the private sector and civil society organizations. They were made in the form of investment loans and credit facilities that would improve the livelihoods of Iraqis, develop infrastructure and provide the basic services needed to establish a secure environment in the liberated areas of Iraq. The State of Kuwait announced its contribution of $1 billion in the form of loans within the framework of the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development, and an additional $1 billion earmarked for investing in projects in Iraq. Two years ago Kuwait also contributed more than $200 million in voluntary assistance at the governmental and public levels in response to the humanitarian impact caused by Da'esh's invasion of Iraq. Last week, Kuwait also hosted the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat Da'esh to ensure the ongoing coordination of international counter-terrorism efforts and the implementation of the strategy developed by the Coalition to put an end to that criminal organization.

With regard to international obligations and humanitarian issues related to missing Kuwaiti citizens and third parties, as well as missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, we will continue to honour our obligations and monitor the periodic reports of the Secretary-General and the briefings of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, pursuant to paragraph 4 of resolution 2107 (2013). I again call upon everyone to make a greater effort, devise an innovative approach to meet obligations with regard to Kuwait in order to make progress on the issue, given the importance and historic value of such archives, in accordance with resolution 2107 (2013), and end the suffering of the families of prisoners and of those who have been missing for more than 27 years.

In conclusion, we hope that cooperation will continue in the same amicable spirit with Iraq. We would like to honour the remaining obligations of the tripartite mechanism and its technical committee headed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, according to the relevant Security Council resolutions, with the aim of achieving substantial and tangible results. I would again like to commend the efforts of UNAMI. We reiterate that we will cooperate fully with UNAMI in order to complete its mandate to the fullest.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those other Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al Hamad Al Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, who is presiding over today's meeting of the Security Council. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his briefing. We appreciate and support his efforts in carrying our the duties entrusted to him. Similarly, my delegation thanks UNAMI for its important and outstanding efforts in discharging its mandate. We encourage it to continue to foster dialogue and coordinate efforts to strengthen the process for peace and reconciliation in Iraq.

We begin by commending the Iraqi security forces on their victory over Da'esh, which was announced by Iraq's Prime Minister, Mr. Haider Al Abadi, on 9 December 2017. We reiterate our sincere gratitude to the Iraqi security forces and to the entire Iraqi population for their courage, sacrifice and resolute fight against terrorism on our behalf. That significant achievement should lead to greater unity among all sectors in society. To that end, political actors and the Government must focus on eliminating sectarian and divisive rhetoric, and call for unity and reconciliation in an effort to achieve stability and reconstruction in Iraq.

In addition, we underscore that, in line with the mandate outlined in resolution 2379 (2017), the Secretary-General and the Government of Iraq agreed on the terms of reference to establish an investigative team to determine those responsible for atrocities committed by Da'esh and bring them to justice before Iraqi courts. We firmly believe that the establishment of an investigative team, led by a special adviser, is crucial to combat impunity, make amends to the victims and bolster reconciliation efforts.

Similarly, amid efforts to rebuild Iraq, we underscore Kuwait's support and willingness to cooperate, as demonstrated by its hosting of the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq on 12 to 14 February. We hope that the pledges will improve the plight of the Iraqi people by prioritizing their development, stability and prosperity. Nonetheless, in spite of such progress, we regret that asymmetrical attacks that claim the lives of innocent civilians still occur. During the reporting period, at least 108 people were killed and more than 240 wounded, including women and children. The plight of more then 1,500 Yazidi women and children still under the control of Da'esh remains a concern that must be addressed as soon as possible.

We take note of the electoral calendar adopted by the Council of Representatives. We hope that the legislation and legal mechanisms required for the electoral process in May this year will be developed in a participatory and inclusive manner by and for Iraqis, with a view to holding orderly, peaceful and transparent elections. We believe that we must step up efforts to ensure the dignified and safe voluntary return of more than 6 million internally displaced persons, and enable them to return to their homes, regain control of their lives and participate freely in the electoral process.

The clearing and removal of explosive remnants of war is essential, as the security of the population is indispensable to the process of reconstruction. Once again, we underscore the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service in Iraq. We call upon the international community to support its work and unite efforts to effectively implement resolution 2365 (2017).

With regard to efforts conducted by Iraq to identify areas where mass graves might be located and to recover and return Kuwaiti property, we take note of the remains founds in Basra and Najaf, and we the support role of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We call upon the international community to provide support to build capacity within the Iraqi Government to identify mass graves and increase and enhance technical skills for improved forensic testing.

Finally, we encourage the parties involved to redouble their efforts to deliver tangible results and give continuity to the process of reconciliation in Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Ján Kubiš, has just provided a succinct briefing to update us on the situation in Iraq and the latest developments there. We thank him for his briefing and excellent work in Iraq as Head of UNAMI. Likewise, we congratulate the entire UNAMI team.

As the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017) (S/2018/42) highlights, on 9 December last year the Government of Iraq declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This turn of events put an end to several years of indescribable indignity committed against the Iraqi population by this terrorist group, which during its occupation starting in 2015 came to control two thirds of the territory of Iraq, committing atrocities of every stripe, with thousands of deaths, millions of internally displaced persons, the massive levelling of all types of infrastructure and the destruction of the economic fabric of the country.

As this is the first time I have taken the floor on the situation in Iraq, I would like, on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, on the one hand, to express our congratulations to the Iraqi Government and the coalition of forces of the international community that made the defeat of ISIL and the total liberation of Iraqi territory possible, and, on the other hand, to demonstrate to the Government and the people of Iraq the solidarity of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in the face of the enormous loss of human life and for all the atrocities and suffering that group inflicted on the Iraqi population as a whole. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea also commends the unity of the Iraqi people, which has greatly contributed to this victory.

Furthermore, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the convening in Kuwait of the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq a few days ago, with the aim of obtaining the necessary funds to undertake the reconstruction of the country. In this regard, we commend Kuwait for its support and the decisive role it has played in holding this conference, at which donors pledged to disburse some $30 billion for the commencement of this reconstruction work. To this end, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the international community to show great solidarity with the Government of Iraq by supporting it in the arduous task of completely rebuilding the country.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends and greatly appreciates the two-year initiative launched by Secretary-General António Guterres at the donor conference — the Iraq Recovery and Resilience Programme — to address the country's many challenges. One of these challenges is the persistent tension between the central Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, as well as the constant risk that ISIL may continue to launch attacks such as the one that took place in northern Baghdad on 13 January. Faced with these situations, we appeal to the Government and the people of Iraq to remain united, overcome their differences and remain vigilant, so that the victory achieved over ISIL is irreversible.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that the greatest challenges now facing the Government and the Iraqi people are the holding of the parliamentary elections on 12 May and the resolution of the very worrying humanitarian situation in the country and the human rights situation, as expressed by Ms. Agnès Callamard following her visit to Iraq in November last year and by Ms. Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights during the presentation of her report on 15 December 2017.

I conclude by expressing the hope that the international community in general and the United Nations in particular will resolutely support the Government and the people of Iraq in overcoming all the foregoing challenges, in order to completely normalize the situation in the country, so that the next legislative elections can be held in an atmosphere of peace and unity for all Iraqis.

Mr. Tileuberdi (Kazakhstan): We highly appreciate the comprehensive update by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš. Kazakhstan values highly the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq aimed at promoting political dialogue and reconciliation. We also appreciate the efforts of the entire United Nations system aimed at providing critical services to the population of Iraq.

We welcome the initiative of the State of Kuwait aimed at providing financial assistance for the post-war regional reconstruction in Iraq. In this context, Kazakhstan welcomed the holding in Kuwait of the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq following its liberation from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from 12 to 14 February. The international community's generous financial pledges and contributions at that conference, designed to rebuild Iraq, gives us hope for a better future for the Iraqi people, who survived terrible adversity during the recent war.

We support the decision of the Iraqi Government to hold national and provincial council elections on 12 May, which will help democracy, State-building processes, consolidation of the Constitution and the

introduction of reforms by fully including all ethnic and religious groups, especially those in the northern regions of the country. Indeed, reducing violence in the liberated territories is very significant politically. At the same time, we call for the participation of all Iraqi citizens in determining the future of their country, particularly in the forthcoming parliamentary electoral campaign and the elections that will follow.

Kazakhstan welcomes the inter-Iraqi agreements to extend the ceasefire regime until the parties agree on the joint management of disputed territories, including border points. We trust that the Government and the local authorities located in the northern part of the country will conduct a constructive dialogue that rejects military action. We stand for more meetings, such as the one held on 20 January between Haider Al Abadi, Prime Minister of Iraq, and Nechirvan Barzani, head of the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan. We consider very useful and timely the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's meetings in January and February with political leaders in Baghdad and Erbil in order to bring the positions of the parties closer.

We are heartened to learn that civilian returns to Iraq's newly accessible areas continue to increase since the conclusion of major counter-ISIL military operations late last year. We are pleased that Mosul, Tal Afar, Al-Hawija, Akashat, Al-Qaim and Rawah were liberated from the Islamic State, while western Anbar province will come completely under Government control. These trends indicate the need for the counter-terrorism mechanisms in Iraq to be enhanced and for security measures at the borders to be strengthened. We consider it expedient that, under the leadership of an ad hoc committee headed by the Prime Minister of Iraq, the transfer of all weapons arsenals of various small tribes and other armed groups operating internally in the country be organized. Accordingly, it is necessary to disband all armed groups so as to prevent further internal political conflicts and favour a move towards stability.

Lastly, we must unhesitatingly endorse and mobilize support for Special Representative's commitment to engaging with all sectors and communities of Iraqi society in order to advance inclusive political dialogue even further. Finally, we also need to improve the delivery of public services, laying the foundations for Statehood, peace, progress and national development in a post-ISIL Iraq.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait for presiding over today's meeting and extend our appreciation to Mr. Ján Kubiš for his briefing on the situation in Iraq.

Peru is closely following developments in Iraq and welcomes the losses inflicted on Da'esh and its expulsion from the country. We commend the support displayed by broad segments of Iraqi society and stress the importance of international support, in particular that of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in attaining this important objective. Nevertheless, as stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/42), there is a need to remain vigilant as to potential terrorist regroupings and fresh terrorist attacks. We regret that in November and December 2017 terrorists were able to take more than 60 lives. We highlight the need to promote the rule of law and to ensure accountability for the atrocities committed by Da'esh, in line with resolution 2379 (2017), adopted by the Council last September.

We support United Nations efforts to facilitate dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil. This new phase should be strengthened and translate into a fluid, complementary relationship between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. We believe it necessary to continue to strengthen and sustain peace in all its aspects, which means that we must rebuild the country and especially strengthen its institutions, in particular its capacity to defend itself, provide security and protect the human rights of its people.

To that end, it is therefore critical that there be an increase in professional civilian staff across all regions of the country, which would help the process of national decentralization. It is also important to tackle corruption and to promote tolerance and reconciliation, as well as work towards the socioeconomic development of the country and the establishment of initiatives and investment and development projects that offer opportunities for all Iraqis, especially its young people.

In this connection, we welcome initiatives such as the United Nations recovery and resilience programme in support of the national development plan launched by the Secretary-General, and the recent international conference convened by Kuwait at which pledges of $30 billion were made to rebuild Iraq. These initiatives point to the growing confidence of the international

community in the future of the country. We believe, therefore, that we must continue to build on this so that we can effectively address the needs of the 3.4 million persons in highly vulnerable situations and the 3.2 million internally displaced persons.

We eagerly await the national elections slated for 12 May and believe it is key to ensure that all citizens participate, especially women and youth, and that internally displaced persons can vote too. We must ensure the credibility and transparency of the process and of the technology to be used.

In all of the areas I mentioned, UNAMI must continue to provide advice and assistance to the Government and the people of Iraq. Peru supports the recommendations made by the external advisory team, which recently proposed a new operational framework and a more efficient use of the Mission's resources that is commensurate with its functions.

We therefore support the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš and his entire team. My country continue to follow closely the Iraqi process, which we believe will continue on this path, which has enabled it to overcome the Da'esh terrorist threat.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation wishes, like other speakers, to thank Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for his high-quality briefing on the situation in Iraq.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the proclamation by the Iraqi Government of its army's victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant after several years of fierce combat. We further welcome the decisive support of the international coalition for the Iraqi army, which made it possible to overcome the Da'esh terrorist group, which posed a genuine threat to international peace and security.

My country hopes that the international mobilization that made possible the rout of the Islamic State in Iraq will continue so as to support reconstruction and rebuilding efforts in the country. In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding from 12 to 14 February of an international conference for the reconstruction of Iraq and expresses its gratitude to the Kuwaiti authorities for this laudable initiative.

We further welcome the momentum gained as well as the considerable pledges announced by States, development funds and other international non-governmental organizations for the rebuilding and recovery of Iraq. We applaud in particular the launch during the conference by the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, of the United Nations recovery and resilience programme for Iraq and expresses its support for the nine key areas of action set forth in the programme.

The time has come for the Iraqi Government, with the assistance of the international community, to seek to bring about a lasting peace in the country through credible democratic institutions and an inclusive national reconciliation process. My country also is of the view that everything possible needs to be done to facilitate the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons. This requires expedited efforts to rebuild in conflict-affected areas and the establishment of basic administrative and social services.

My delegation is of the view that all stakeholders in Iraq must, in an atmosphere of calm, set the stage for the peaceful conduct of inclusive, democratic legislative elections on 12 May. We welcome the deployment in Iraq of an electoral needs assessment mission to assist in priority areas of action where the United Nations can provide support. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his good offices vis-à-vis women's representation and participation in political and electoral processes and in the reconciliation efforts under way.

My delegation remains troubled at the security level by the sporadic asymmetrical attacks staged by the Da'esh terrorist group, which retains a considerable capacity to do harm. It exhorts the international community to support the Iraqi Government so as to do away with this residual terrorism and provide the Iraqi people with the conditions for lasting stability and security.

Côte d'Ivoire also encourages the Iraqi authorities to launch the security-sector reform programme to ensure that there are professional security forces who will respect the rule of law and human rights.

Finally, my delegation calls upon the Iraqi authorities to duly consider the UNAMI-supported draft law on the creation of a specialized court for international crimes committed in Iraq. We also commend the Mission and encourage the Special Representative to persevere in

his efforts to win support for the reconstruction of Iraq and the strengthening of its institutions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the sisterly State of Kuwait on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank it for its efforts. I also thank the Republic of Kazakhstan for its efforts during its presidency last month. In addition, I highly appreciate the efforts deployed by the outgoing countries Ukraine, Japan, Italy, Egypt, Uruguay and Senegal. I also wish every success to The State of Kuwait, the Netherlands, Poland, Peru, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. We hope to cooperate with these countries during their term in the Council to achieve the common interests of all States Members of the United Nations.

I wish also to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his briefing and for the efforts he has undertaken together with his team.

The security forces of all categories were able to establish their full dominance on the international Iraqi-Syrian border, from the Al-Walid border crossing to the Rabia border crossing, and managed to liberate Mosul and Ramadi islands and establish full control over all areas along the border with Syria. The whole of Iraqi territory has thus been freed from the grip of Da'esh terrorist factions. Iraq is now at the threshold of a new phase that will involve implementing comprehensive Government reforms on the political, economic and social fronts.

The Government and people pf Iraq would like to thank all the States that have participated in the international coalition, particularly the United States and the European Union countries, as well as all the friendly countries that were not part of the coalition but have combated terrorism, supplied Iraq's security forces with military and logistical support and worked in coordination with them while respecting our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These national and international efforts have achieved historic victory over those criminal factions.

One of the priorities of the Government of Iraq is building a lasting peace, which is a challenge that is as significant as that of guaranteeing our citizens a decent living. Iraq belongs to the Iraqi people, regardless of their affiliation or views. The Government has adopted a national strategy for an interfaith dialogue that is founded on the principles of civil harmony and fostering unity among Iraqis which have helped us to achieve a historic victory against Da'esh terrorist factions.

In order to respond to the Iraqi people's desire to succeed in the international campaign to bring Da'esh to justice for the crimes it has committed in Iraq, in particular genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, Iraq, through negotiations with the United Nations Secretariat and with the help of friendly states, has been able to put together an acceptable mandate that ensures full respect for its sovereignty and jurisdiction in the task of collecting criminal evidence for crimes committed by Da'esh. We hope to see a head appointed for this team, in accordance with the mandate, and we call on Member States to provide it with short- and long-term financial and logistical support.

With the aim of rebuilding our liberated cities and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, which will enable us to significantly improve our citizens' daily lives and tackle our development challenges, the relevant Iraqi authorities, together with our partners from the international organizations, have formulated many plans and strategies we need to make progress in the post-Da'esh phase in Iraq, most important of which is the national development and poverty reduction plans 2018-2022, a strategy for eradicating slums in Iraq, a plan for a social development fund and a strategy for developing the private sector 2015-2030.

We are also putting together a national framework document for the reconstruction of liberated cities 2018-2027. Our National Development Plan 2018-2022 is characterized by including new concepts such as promoting administrative decentralization; the revitalization of the private sector; focus on human capital; economic recovery; investment in the education and health sectors and the provision of basic services; the empowerment of women and young people and of vulnerable groups and their involvement in the country's economic life; and job creation for the very poor and support for small and medium enterprises.

The Iraqi Government expects the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to play a vital role in establishing mechanisms that will coordinate the efforts of all United Nations agencies operating in

Iraq, especially in the areas of assistance, the sharing of expertise and social and economic capacity-building, which directly affect our citizens' daily lives. The Mission's work during post-Da'esh phase must respond to the challenges, circumstances and needs of the Iraqi people. My Government believes that the Mission can play a coordinating role focusing on the following pressing issues: first, promoting good governance, strengthening administrative institutions, fighting corruption and improving the country's economic growth and diversification; secondly, tackling environmental issues, addressing sandstorms in Iraq and providing high-quality essential services; thirdly, investment in human capital and reducing youth unemployment; fourthly, delivering humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons and enabling them to return to their liberated cities; and fifthly, rebuilding cities liberated from Da'esh, assisting the victims of terrorism and combating violent extremism.

With regard to the report of the independent review, after studying the summary submitted by the United Nations pertaining to the team's recommendations for the Mission's new mandate, the Government of Iraq believes that those recommendations do not distinguish between the Mission's political mandate, which permits it to respond to Iraq's general needs, and internal issues that are governed by the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution and our established laws. For that reason, Iraq does not support the recommendations related to the mandate, specifically conflict prevention, the empowerment of women and minorities, and relations between the central Government and the Kurdistan Government. Those recommendations come under the purview of the Iraqi Government, its constitutional authorities and its internal affairs.

Iraq was not in a state of conflict. It was a war that Iraq waged against an international terrorist organization whose members come from 120 different States Members of the United Nations, some of which have helped to finance them. We believe that national reconciliation should be comprehensive and not limited to a particular ethnic or religious sector to the detriment of another. Rather, it should encompass every sector of society while respecting the Constitution, legal and judicial system and Iraqi unity.

With regard to the empowerment of women, the Iraqi Constitution accords women all rights and ensures their representation in Parliament, where they hold 25 per cent of seats. In accordance with resolution 1325 (2000), our Council of Ministers has created an ad hoc department for the empowerment of Iraqi women. We have also established a high commission to promote Iraqi women's status that is the national entity involved in international Iraqi commitments to issues concerning the empowerment of women, and in follow up with the relevant national parties. The official authorities work with international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and others, to establish small enterprises for women and boost their participation in economic and political life. They issue recommendations to improve the legal and economic status of women in Iraq and to provide assistance to Iraqi women through the social care system which is financed from the general budget.

Iraq does not support any UNAMI mandate related to what the report calls "minorities". Our Constitution identifies such groups as integral components because we are racially and religiously a diversified country. All of our constitutionally recognized components make up the distinct Iraqi identity. The groups of the Iraqi components — including Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Sabaean, Feylis, Sunnis and Shiites of Arab, Kurdish or Turkmen origin — are indigenous peoples that have built the Iraqi civilization. They are represented in the general elected Government, which consists of all components and cares for all specificities. This Government, since its establishment and under the aegis of Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi, has sought to unite the Iraqi people and to ensure their safety and a decent life on the basis of the rule of law.

Our Government also aspires to rebuild all of our country's cities so as to enable its components to live in harmony together after being liberated from terrorism. In this regard, Iraq appreciates the role of the United Nations agencies working in Iraq, especially the United Nations Development Programme, which, alongside the relevant Iraqi ministries and authorities, delivers effective assistance to all liberated areas, thereby enabling an equal delivery of assistance so as to avoid discrimination. That also helps to foster hope for the residents of the liberated areas, all of whom suffered from the crimes committed by Da'esh.

The Iraqi Government, with the assistance of partners and international organizations, has managed to implement programmes for the return of refugees expelled by Da'esh terrorist factions. They are now able to return to the liberated cities. The Government has established an integrated programme to achieve

stability, deliver necessary services and preserve religious and ethnic diversity in those cities, while securing the State's exclusive right to possess weapons. We call on the international community to contribute to rebuilding the cities that have been destroyed. We commend the continued commitment of the European Union to assisting Iraq in the short and long terms by adopting a special strategy to meet Iraq's current needs.

The delegation of my country appreciates the efforts of the Secretariat to honour the requests of the Independent High Electoral Commission in Iraq and deliver assistance to strengthen our national capacity. The Iraqi Council of Representatives has set forth a timetable for elections to be held on 12 May, seeking to ensure that it will be a historic day for a modern Iraq in which Iraqi people participate in the legislative election process.

In order to build on the democratic political process, the Iraqi Government intends to ensure the participation of internally displaced persons in the upcoming parliamentary elections by securing protection for all voters and guaranteeing the transparent outcome of the elections so that they will be deemed successful and contribute to entrenching democracy and the peaceful exchange of power.

My delegation thanks the State of sisterly Kuwait for the efforts it has undertaken with the World Bank and the European Union, as well as the United Nations in Iraq, in preparation to host the Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, which was held in Kuwait from 12 to 14 February. Iraq places great hope on the outcome of that Conference and its implementation mechanisms. We are grateful to all States that attended. The goals of the Conference pertained to investments and development, based on studies that assess the damage wrought in Iraq with respect to infrastructure and the delivery of basic services.

The Government of Iraq reaffirms its commitment to undertaking greater efforts in order to make progress on the matters of the disappeared Kuwaiti citizens and Kuwaiti archives. Our national and joint commissions are sparing no effort to determine the fate of the disappeared Kuwaiti persons and others. The Ministry of Defence, in conjunction with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Baghdad, has been conducting field investigations in Shakhat and 'Ayn Tamr in Karbala, Salman Pak in Baghdad, Khamisiyah in Dhi Qar, Salman Road in Al-Muthanna, Al-Razi Street in Diali and other places. It holds regular meetings on a quarterly basis with the participation of UNAMI to inform all stakeholders about recent developments. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Defence are also stepping up efforts and are engaged in media campaigns and field visits to find new witnesses and collect new information to achieve tangible results and identify the whereabouts of Kuwaiti detained and missing persons, including Kuwaiti materials and records to be returned to Kuwait.

To conclude, we thank Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and his team for advising the Iraqi Government and conducting the activities of the Mission with a view to achieving a united and stable Iraq, free from terrorism. I also thank the Deputy Special Representative of UNAMI, Ms. Lise Grande, and we wish her every success.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8185

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8185th meeting
Wednesday, 21 February 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Sheikh Al-Sabah	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Amon-Tanoh
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tileuberdi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Czaputowicz
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/85)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/85)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the former Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/85, which contains a letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Allow me, in this very important debate related to the Charter and to the maintenance of international peace and security, to convey, before reading out my statement, a personal emotion that I cannot hide.

I am deeply saddened by the terrible suffering of the civilian population in eastern Ghouta, where 400,000 people live in hell on Earth.

I know that very important consultations are taking place in the Council, aimed at achieving a cessation of hostilities in Syria for a month, with a number of conditions, and of course I fully support that effort. But I believe that eastern Ghouta cannot wait, and so my appeal to all those involved is for an immediate suspension of all war activities in eastern Ghouta, allowing humanitarian aid to reach all those in need and for the evacuation of an estimated 700 people who need urgent treatment that cannot be provided there, and creating the possibility for other civilians to be effectively treated on-site. This is a human tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes, and I do not think we can allow things to go on happening in this horrendous way.

I thank the Government of Kuwait for organizing this briefing. I would like to express my appreciation to Kuwait for hosting last week's International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq. I reiterate the call I made there for global solidarity with Iraq in the task of reconstruction. Let me also acknowledge that the liberation of Kuwait from the forces of Saddam Hussein took place 27 years ago this month. This anniversary — of an undertaking in which the international community used the Charter to uphold the Charter — is a fitting backdrop to today's discussion.

The Charter of the United Nations has stood the test of time. Drafted following the utter collapse of international order, it helped to stitch the world back together. Drawn up as the full scope of the Holocaust was emerging, it is part of the global bulwark against international crimes today. But of course, the founders of our Organization understood that recovering from the Second World War was not only a matter of preventing crimes. They placed people at the heart of the Charter and proclaimed that the true basis of peace was to be found in promoting respect for human rights and securing social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom for all.

Today, the Charter's principles — non-use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-intervention, cooperation, self-determination and the sovereign equality of Member States — remain the foundation of international relations. The values it proclaims — equal rights, non-discrimination, tolerance and good-neighbourliness — remain guideposts for global harmony. However, the challenges we face have evolved, the drivers of conflict have become more complex, new threats have emerged, and the consequences of instability now flow far beyond their source. Addressing the challenge of migration, as well as the threats of climate change and inequality, will test the Charter and our capacity to secure a better world for all. Thus, while the Charter's principles are as relevant

as ever, we must continue to update its tools, we must use those tools with greater determination, and we must go back to the Charter's roots for inspiration as we strive to deliver for "we the peoples".

That work starts with prevention. As I said to the Council at the beginning of my mandate, the international community spends far more time and resources responding to crises than in preventing them. We have to rebalance our approach to international peace and security. Our goal must be to do everything we can to help countries avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on humankind. This vision extends beyond wars and conflicts to natural disasters, fragility and other kinds of stress. Our commitment must be to all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — and to eliminate discrimination based on gender, religion, race, nationality or other status. Across this work, we must recognize the great power of women's participation, which makes peace agreements sturdier, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.

Preventing crises is primarily the responsibility of Member States. Chapter VI of the Charter describes the tools that are available to them for that purpose: negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement and other peaceful measures and means. The United Nations is there to offer support to States in resolving their disputes and preventing the emergence of crises.

The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. I encourage Member States to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court and to make greater use of the Court and of other international courts and tribunals to help settle and avoid the escalation of their disputes.

The United Nations prevention efforts in The Gambia, Guinea and Burkina Faso over the past several years, always taken in coordination with and often in direct support of the activities of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, highlight the conditions under which these efforts are most successful. The role played in those contexts by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel underscores the value of United Nations regional political presences, as in other contexts does the work of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

Mediation is among the paths suggested by Chapter VI. In recent weeks, the new High-Level Mediation Advisory Board has undertaken its first initiative. We have planned a number of other missions — with the agreement of the countries concerned — to Member States facing stability challenges. My own good offices are available to the Security Council at all times to help prevent, manage or resolve conflicts.

Of course, the Charter confers upon the Security Council powers and responsibilities in the field of conflict prevention. At this time, it is especially urgent for the Security Council to uphold its responsibility to bring about a political settlement on Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), under United Nations auspices.

Sustaining peace is a key part of prevention. My report on sustaining peace (S/2018/43) is now before the entire membership, and I look forward to taking forward its proposals. Prevention also depends crucially on advancing sustainable and inclusive development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers an integrated framework for addressing the economic and social drivers of conflict and for building stable societies, including through a focus on institutions and the rule of law.

The word "peacekeeping" does not appear in the Charter, but that flagship United Nations activity is firmly rooted in the Charter's ideals and demonstrates the Charter's flexibility. Peacekeeping has a solid record of service, sacrifice and success, and it has ably served as a tool to assist in the peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as to achieve more robust objectives. However, today peacekeeping faces major challenges. Often, peacekeepers are deployed indefinitely to dangerous environments where there is little peace to keep, where there are no political solutions in sight, where there are multiple armed groups and where casualties are rising sharply from attacks on peacekeepers. For these and other reasons, the United Nations ends up serving as a crisis baby-sitter or focusing on simple containment — and that is simply not sustainable.

A detailed plan of action to enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers is being implemented by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and our missions. The Department is also carrying out a series of strategic reviews under the guidance of the Security Council. There is no one-size-fits-all operation. Our aim is to refocus peacekeeping with realistic

expectations; with well-structured, well-supported and well-equipped forces; and with the support we need from host countries. We look to the Security Council to provide clear and focused mandates, and we call for greater engagement on the part of all Member States in providing personnel and political, material and financial backing.

At the same time, peacekeeping is not the solution to all crisis situations. Different contexts may require other kinds of action, including peace enforcement and counter-terrorist operations undertaken by coalitions of Member States. Here, too, clear Security Council mandates and predictable, adequate funding will be critical.

Today, we have the highest number of United Nations sanctions regimes in the history of the Organization. Since implementation goes beyond Member States, greater attention may need to be paid to the private sector, in particular the financial industry. We must be careful to avoid unintended consequences, including humanitarian ones.

Let me turn now from Chapters VI and VII to Chapter VIII. Even before most regions had created regional or subregional organizations, the drafters of the Charter recognized the value of regional arrangements and agencies as a first resort for the pacific settlement of local disputes. Regional perspectives are critical in understanding challenges. Regional capacities are crucial for rapid deployment. Regional ownership is essential for solutions to take root.

Among the most vital and dynamic of today's partnerships is our work with the African Union. Our organizations have signed two new framework agreements — on peace and security, and on the alignment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with Africa's Agenda 2063. I again call on the international community to ensure predictable and adequate financing for African forces operating in Somalia, the Sahel and around Lake Chad. We are also forging closer ties with the European Union and several other organizations.

The purposes and principles of the Charter speak to today's challenges as firmly as they spoke to people who had just lived through the most horrible war the world has ever seen. The reforms in which we are all engaged, which span peace and security, development and management, aim to make us more effective in fulfilling the Charter's vision. The Charter is our living template for serving "we the peoples". The Secretariat stands ready to help Member States embrace the full spirit of the Charter and use it to its full potential across all pillars of our work.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon: As this is my first time back at the United Nations and addressing the Security Council as a former Secretary-General of the United Nations, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for having invited me to take part in this important meeting. I also commend the Government of Kuwait for its successful presidency of the Security Council in the month of February.

The world we live in today is completely different from what it was seven decades ago, when the United Nations was founded. While we have seemingly moved on from the era of large-scale war between States, today we face an increasing number of emerging global challenges. They include climate change, tens of millions of refugees, violent extremism, terrorism and nuclear proliferation, to name just a few. At the same time, the fourth industrial revolution, represented by enormous technological advancements — such as in the areas of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and biological engineering — has brought about dramatic changes in the shape and form of our daily lives. They will also have a significant impact on the security environment of the future world.

Under those dramatically changing circumstances of today's world, some are questioning the role and effectiveness of the United Nations as a whole. However, those critics may also agree that, without the United Nations, the international community could have never succeeded in preventing another world war in the past 70-plus years. Furthermore, if it were not for the United Nations, the international community would not have been able to make significant gains on eradicating extreme poverty, promoting public health and scaling up access to education. Who else would have been able to provide legitimacy for the actions that the Security Council takes in addressing conflicts today?

The primary responsibilities vested in the Security Council to maintain international peace and security

are therefore needed now more than ever. In that regard, I value the Council's improved working relations with the other interconnected pillars of the United Nations system, and also its increased focus on the concept of sustaining peace. Addressing the root causes of conflict and working towards preventing conflicts before they escalate, alongside national and international stakeholders, will ultimately make the Council, and the Organization, stronger as a result.

In order to effectively respond to non-traditional and transnational security challenges such as climate change, terrorism and violent extremism, nuclear proliferation and cross-border insecurity, the Security Council should undergo reforms to be more flexible in its decision-making process. Reform of the Security Council is long overdue.

We must also remind ourselves of the fact that the primary responsibility for preserving peace and security lies with Member States themselves. The failure of some national leaders to fulfil their responsibilities to their own peoples significantly undermines the role of the United Nations in resolving conflicts. That can also lead to some Member States neglecting their responsibility to protect their own citizens, while hiding behind the concepts of national ownership and State sovereignty.

Those political leaders often create dire political and economic instabilities where innocent civilians bear the bulk of the suffering. We have learned by now that, in order to hold such leaders accountable, the Security Council should not limit itself to simply calling for actions in rhetoric or statements. The Council must act on those situations.

Having said that, I would like to touch on several international and regional conflicts.

In the Middle East, we must now be prepared for the post-Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) era. The Security Council must focus more on northern Syria, the ongoing civil war in Syria, tension in the Golan Heights and the continuing Syrian crisis of refugees and internally displaced persons. Those issues could resurface, seriously threaten regional stability and lead to further conflicts among States in the region. Such instability could lead to exacerbating tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and bring Israel and Iran closer to direct conflict.

Violence between Israel and Hizbullah in Lebanon and other regional threats could also have the potential to spin out of control as a result of deteriorating regional security.

In addition, after losing its territories of terror in the Middle East, we cannot dismiss the possibility of ISIS moving on to settle in vulnerable places such as Libya.

The division among member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council is also of serious concern. In that regard, I highly commend the mediating role played by His Highness Sheikh Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of Kuwait.

Exposure to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism is especially alarming in places like the Sahel region in Africa. As extreme poverty, terrorism, the illicit arms trade and human trafficking are all prevalent in a volatile cross-border environment, we must bolster our collective actions to address such vulnerabilities. During my tenure as Secretary-General, in June 2013, I established the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel to address such issues. I am pleased to see that Secretary-General António Guterres, the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission are working in triangular cooperation to advance that important effort.

Towards the end of my second term as Secretary-General, in April 2016, the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted twin resolutions (resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262) on the review of United Nations peacebuilding architecture. The resolutions expressed deep concern about the high human cost and suffering caused by armed conflict.

Today, not only do international peace and security issues remain at a critical juncture, but multilateralism is also at stake. We must remember that multilateralism cannot be upheld by one Member State alone or a group of States. The United Nations, especially the Security Council, must continue to endeavour to strengthen that driving ideal, while overcoming whatever challenges may loom over the horizon.

In that regard, I must emphasize that the entire United Nations membership should faithfully and thoroughly implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, while coping with other new challenges, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, among others.

In that connection, as Secretary-General António Guterres has stated, I believe that the situation on the Korean peninsula is currently our most serious and imminent challenge. As we all know, today the Korean peninsula is faced with serious challenges as a result of the continued nuclear tests and long-range ballistic missile launches conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. At the end of last year, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea announced its "completion of State nuclear force" and proclaimed itself a "nuclear State." That is a serious threat to international peace and security and clearly violates all the relevant Security Council resolutions and the regime established by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

In fact, the Security Council has responded with tough measures, including increasingly stronger sanctions, to deter the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear development. Six of the 10 different resolutions adopted since its first nuclear test, in 2006, were adopted in the past two years alone. Firm and unified actions by the Security Council will be essential until North Korea's nuclear weapons and programmes are completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantled.

In that regard, I urge the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to fully abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions. At the same time, I urge all Member States to do their part in helping to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue through diplomatic efforts. Only by seeking solutions to all these problems through peaceful means can we uphold the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

In that regard, the participation of North Korean athletes in the XXIII Winter Olympic Games, in PyeongChang, South Korea, has aroused much hope and expectation around the world. I warmly welcome the recent resumption of inter-Korean dialogue and the resulting reconciliatory atmosphere between the two Koreas that was created before, and has existed during, the Olympic Games.

We must keep alive that hard-won and newly created momentum for dialogue, so that the narrow window of opportunity it has provided will be able to lead to a more meaningful and genuine dialogue process towards reconciliation, peace and the ultimate denuclearization of North Korea. The denuclearization of the Korean peninsula would also help to spur the establishment of wider peace and stability in North-East Asia, thereby setting the stage for greater regional development and prosperity.

That process also requires the whole-hearted support of the United Nations, and I count on the Security Council in moving the whole process to that end. We need genuine and strong commitment from both South and North Korea to engage in dialogue, while supported by the United States, China, Japan and Russia. The current reconciliatory atmosphere must be nurtured through the continued engagement of both the South and North Korean authorities. The United States can also play a crucial role in engaging with North Korea, as was suggested by President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea.

Throughout my years as Secretary-General, I witnessed the unique power of sports in contributing to peace and development in many places around the world. I am happy to have seen such positive energy once again in my country during the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. In that regard, I would like to commend Mr. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee, for his visionary leadership in facilitating the North Korean athletes' participation in the Games, particularly that of the joint women's ice-hockey team.

Once again, I would like to thank the President and the members of the Security Council for inviting me to address the Council, during which I look forward to an active exchange of thoughts and ideas.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

At the outset, allow me to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his valuable briefing. I assure him that the State of Kuwait will spare no effort during its mandate to be a good supporter to his efforts and vision towards improving the mechanisms of the United Nations, thereby strengthening its effectiveness in reducing the dangers and threats facing our world today.

I would also like to thank former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for participating in this meeting and delivering a valuable briefing that is the result of a decade at the helm of the United Nations. This is a historic moment. We are in the presence of

two — the current and former — Secretaries-General in one meeting. I am therefore deeply grateful that they accepted the invitation to participate in this meeting. We will not find a better person to address the Security Council on the importance of our topic today than a former and present Secretary-General.

It is appropriate to start this meeting on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security by quoting the first lines of the Preamble of the Charter, which illustrate the reason for our meeting:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

The State of Kuwait decided to convene this important meeting to discuss our collective responsibility and commitment regarding the purposes and principles of the Charter, which represent a constitution pertaining to multilateral and international action. The members of the Council are gathered in the Chamber today to examine the tools set out in the Charter, which the Council has at its disposal, to effectively maintain international peace and security and address the challenges currently facing the world.

The Charter of the United Nations is an instrument of an international legal nature that serves as a clear framework for regulating relations among States. If we abided by its provisions, threats undermining peace and security would decrease. It is also necessary to implement its provisions on an equal footing, effectively and collectively, while committing ourselves to its purposes and principles. It is essential that we work together as one to end violence and aggression, establish friendly relations among nations; ensure respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of others, as well as equal rights and the right to self-determination; and promote and encourage respect for human rights. Despite the fact that those purposes and principles exist and that all Members of the United Nations should abide by them, we find that they are flagrantly flouted in ways that undermine not only regional peace and security, but also international security in general. We in the State of Kuwait underwent a very trying situation, which everyone is aware of, as a result of grave violations of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The State of Kuwait did not decide to choose the purposes and principles of the Charter as the topic for today's meeting at random. We are currently the smallest Member State on the Council in terms of our physical size. However, the issue of respecting the provisions of the United Nations Charter and the rules of international law is extremely important for all countries, in particular the small ones. In fact, the principles and purposes of the Charter represent the first line of defence for small countries. The holding of this meeting in February was also not based on a random decision. Every year on 26 February, The State of Kuwait celebrates its liberation from the Iraqi occupation in 1991. That liberation was the consequence of the international community's commitment to abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter. In a few days from now, we will celebrate the twenty-seventh anniversary of our liberation.

The example of Kuwait's liberation clearly attests to what we can do when the international community pools its efforts under the umbrella of the United Nations, as well as through the legitimate Security Council resolutions supporting the rule of law and upholding rights, justice, while combating tyranny and injustice. The process leading to the liberation of Kuwait is a historic and successful model that highlights the Security Council's ability to set right the situation caused by an act of aggression, the goal of which was to undermine and violate the noble purposes and principles of the Charter. In that context, I would like to raise three important issues.

First, the tools that the Security Council has at its disposal in order to shoulder its responsibilities. Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations, its Charter has in no way diminished in importance. The Charter includes tools that enable us to confront challenges, including Chapter VI, which provides an important tool for resolving disputes through peaceful means, negotiations, mediation and arbitration, to name a few. This tool should be further activated. In fact, measures adopted by the Council in times of crisis frequently represent a delayed reaction to an event. Often, the Council fails to consider preventive measures to prevent emerging crises by addressing them from the outset.

The root causes of crises are often attributable to economic and social issues, such as poverty and unemployment. The Security Council often forgets that the third pillar of the United Nations Charter — after peace and security, and human rights — is development. Working to achieve sustainable development requires an environment that is conducive to political stability and security, and confronting the root causes of the challenges that we are aware of. In this context, we note that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a very specific Sustainable Development Goal — Goal 16 — which calls for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Early warning and addressing conflicts before they erupt requires the political will of the Council. Let us recall some of the massacres and tragedies when the Council failed to adopt the measures necessary to save thousands and even millions of lives, such as the Rwanda genocide and the Srebrenica massacre. Those are examples that demonstrate the failure of the Council and the international community to act to prevent such crises in a timely manner. They are lessons for us all.

We are also aware that, in certain circumstances, mediation, negotiations and other peaceful means probably will not lead to resolving crises, but in those cases Chapter VII allows for the use of force so as to maintain or restore international peace and security. The liberation of Kuwait demonstrated the effectiveness and legitimacy of Chapter VII through a legitimate military response to a despicable military invasion. That response was mandated by resolution 678 (1990) after all diplomatic means had been exhausted.

With regard to Chapter VIII, we firmly believe in the constructive role that regional and subregional organizations can play in contributing to the establishment of peace and security regionally and internationally. We call for greater cooperation between the Security Council and such regional organizations.

My second point concerns the unity of the Security Council. The Council has many tools at its disposal for settling crises, including those that promote their peaceful resolution before they erupt. However, being able to use such tools successfully depends on the Council's unity and ability to agree and reach a consensus. Over the years and decades, we have seen the Council sometimes unable to settle crises because of divergent points of view among Council members, above all regarding the use of the right of veto. Among the issues that have been affected most negatively by the failure of the Council to act is the Palestinian question, which has been on the Council's agenda for more than 70 years and has yet to be resolved. There is also the Syrian crisis, which is entering its seventh year and has cost the lives of more than 400,000 people. The unity of the Security Council, in particular its five permanent members, is of the utmost importance if it is to function and take decisions effectively and decisively.

My third point relates to the Secretary-General. We highly appreciate the efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres to improve the two pillars of peace and security in the work of the United Nations organs. We support his vision, in particular concerning international diplomacy and the need to take all preventive measures before emergency situations erupt. We stress the important and key role played by the Secretary-General in bringing any matter to the attention of the Security Council, pursuant to Article 99 of the Charter.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that the State of Kuwait has returned to the Council after 40 years with the same principles that it defended during its first term in 1978 and 1979, despite the major changes that the world has undergone over the last four decades. That is the Kuwait that members have known over the years: contributing in the efforts to maintain international peace and security; believing in dialogue over brute force; seeking good neighborly relations and ensuring the best relations with its neighbors; leading regional mediation and settling conflicts through peaceful means; active in multilateral diplomacy; leader in supporting humanitarian work; and committed to the the purposes and principles of the United Nations, both in letter and spirit.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

Mr. Czaputowicz (Poland): First of all, let me thank the State of Kuwait, and in particular His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for convening today's important debate. Let me also thank Secretary General António Guterres for his valuable remarks, and former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his important comments. Those comments demonstrate the continuation of work of the Security

Council in the field of maintaining international peace and security.

It is indisputable that the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations proclaim the most fundamental values for the international community of States. They describe both the goals that should be pursued and the essential rules that should be followed. I would like to reiterate that Poland has always been deeply committed to the fundamental ideas constituting the legal basis of the United Nations, beginning with the signing of the Declaration by United Nations in 1942. Throughout over 70 years of our membership in the United Nations, Poland has been strongly committed to maintaining international peace and security. That strong commitment continues until the present day — when Poland, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, makes efforts aimed at strengthening the Charter and enhancing trust in international law.

Let me recall the sometimes underestimated principle set out in Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Charter, which states:

> "[a]ll Members, in order to ensure to all of them the rights and benefits resulting from membership, shall fulfill in good faith the obligations assumed by them in accordance with the present Charter."

That principle should be considered as a Grundnorm — in other words, a fundamental norm — for United Nations Members. In fact, as a horizontal system of cooperation, international law depends on the reliability and constancy of commitments undertaken by States. That principle consists of two parts, namely, the fulfilment of the obligations assumed and acting in good faith.

With regard to the first part — the fulfilment of the obligations assumed — we stress that respecting obligations by every State is a basic tenet of international legal relations. It ensures confidence and trust among States.

As for the second part, the principle of good faith obliges States to apply their international law duties reasonably and in such a manner that their purpose can be achieved legally. That principle works as a corrective factor and prevents the abuse of one's rights. Respecting international law obligations in good faith therefore means that States must abstain from acts contrary to the purpose of their commitments and obligations. Let me stress that, if a State acts without respect for the principles set out iin Article 2, it diminishes the significance of the Charter and, in consequence, the global peace architecture based on it.

In that context, it is indispensable, once again, to strengthen our call for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. The date of today's debate — 27 years after the liberation of the State of Kuwait, in which Poland was actively engaged — is a forceful reminder for the international community of States. Today too we face one of the most egregious expressions of the threat to international peace and security, that is, the aggression of one State against another.

We reiterate that the Security Council has proved to be a guardian of the purposes and principles of the Charter. Therefore, the Council should be considered the ultimate custodian of States' territorial sovereignty, the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, the prohibition of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and without distinction. It is also the Security Council that can take significant initiatives and actions in that regard. One of the most prominent examples of the pivotal role of the Security Council as a guardian of the maintenance of international peace and security wasthe liberation of the State of Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation.

Moreover, actions taken to prosecute the alleged perpetrators of the most heinous international crimes through the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, as well as through the referral of cases to the International Criminal Court, have also been of paramount importance. Equally, Council resolutions aimed at combating international terrorism must be acknowledged and commended.

Nonetheless, there are still flagrant violations of international law posing threats to international peace and security, as well as to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the illegal annexation of Crimea and support for separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. In that vein, we are also deeply concerned about violations of international humanitarian law and the Chemical Weapons Convention in Syria.

Having mentioned Syria, I must also refer to very worrying developments we learned about yesterday with regard to further shelling of eastern Ghouta. There

is no justification for indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities. They must stop, and parties to the conflict must strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We call upon everyone to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children, by granting them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance. We urgently call for stopping hostilities in all of Syria.

As stated by the Secretary General,

> "[p]eace is a tireless undertaking, to which all United Nations agencies and bodies must work, in accordance with their mandates and responsibilities." (*S/PV.7926, p. 2*)

We therefore pledge to engage actively in all efforts to strengthen the role of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. We cannot forget that the Security Council is not only one of the guardians of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, but is also obliged, under the Charter, to act in accordance with them.

Mr. Amon-Tanoh (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to welcome the convening of this meeting on the maintenance of international peace and security and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the relevance and timeliness of which invites us to turn to the resources of the Charter and the Security Council for answers to the concerns of our world regarding peace and security. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation for the kind invitation to participate in this high-level meeting.

I congratulate Secretary-General António Guterres on the quality of his statement, as well as the former Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his insightful contribution.

The convening of this meeting by your country, Mr. President, 27 years after its liberation by an international coalition led by the Security Council, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of our common Organization, is a strong symbol of the strength of our principles. My country, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council at that time, in 1990 and 1991, contributed significantly to the triumph of the law and the values enshrined in the Preamble to the Charter by playing a decisive role in the adoption of resolutions 678 (1990) and 687 (1991), seeking to end Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. Côte d'Ivoire's resolute affirmation of the founding principles of our Organization at a decisive moment in its existence reflects the deep values of my country and its faith in the ideal of the United Nations Charter.

Born from the resolve of States to protect people from further destructive conflicts, the United Nations is constantly working to maintain international peace and security. Its Charter advocates the peaceful settlement of disputes and regulates the use of the coercive measures it provides in the event of the persistence of a conflict. Our Council is therefore conversant with Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the Charter, in addition to the provisions of Articles 1 and 2 of Chapter I, on building and preserving peace.

The geopolitical changes of the world have reinforced the need to put the Charter and the Security Council at the centre of our reflections on international peace and security by going beyond the constraints of sovereignty — increasingly brandished by Member States — and prioritizing our obligation to end serious attacks on the right to life. The sustainability of the architecture of the maintenance of international peace and security is therefore based on the ability of the Charter to adapt to the requirements of each major period in history, as well as that of Member States to restore the strength of moral values in their relations. In such circumstances, it is necessary to assess the impact of the changing nature of conflicts and the emergence of new global threats on the effectiveness of the instruments of the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Côte d'Ivoire is convinced that one of the greatest responsibilities of the international community today is the prevention of armed conflict, which, if properly managed, could save humankind from further suffering. It is in that spirit that the participants in the 2005 World Summit, held here at the United Nations, emphasized the pressing need to promote a culture of prevention. In that context, it is appropriate to highlight and commend the good offices of the Office of the Secretary-General, which constitute a fundamental element in conflict prevention and resolution through preventive diplomacy. The effectiveness of that instrument, however, lies in the ability of the Secretary-General to embody the moral authority of our Organization and his persuasive force, particularly in regard to the Security Council and General Assembly.

Our Organization has transformed itself structurally so as to be able to detect the beginnings of conflict and ensure that conflict prevention and diplomacy are no longer discrete tools largely dependent on, inter alia, the good will of the parties and cooperation of neighbouring countries. To that end, we must make conflict prevention a key component in how the United Nations operates in the area of peace and security. My delegation encourages training in and support for early warning mechanisms put in place by subregional and regional organizations, and support for the establishment of prevention mechanisms by civil society structures. We must, however, recognize that the efforts of the international community to prevent conflict have not been enough to prevent the outbreak of conflicts in the world.

By signing the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the founding Members sought to create a new world order based on multilateralism and its mission to make peace a universal common good, the preservation of which has been entrusted to the United Nations and the Security Council, within the framework of its fundamental responsibilities.

The proliferation of intra-State conflicts and civil wars is straining the United Nations peacekeeping system, established during the Cold War, in response to the problem of global insecurity. It raises as a priority the question of the legitimacy, legality and necessity of the use of force against a Member State, without the prior authorization of the Security Council, in order to prevent civilian massacres.

That issue, which remains relevant, especially in the light of the paralysis of our Council when facing the most serious crises, is central to the doubts concerning the effectiveness of the instruments of the Charter. Indeed, the effectiveness of those instruments is sorely tested when confronting serious human rights violations and mass crimes such as those perpetrated in Somalia in 1993, Rwanda in 1994 and Bosnia in 1995, even though a peacekeeping operation was present on the ground.

Beyond peacekeeping operations, the issue of the legality and necessity of the use of force also arises with regard to armed interventions by coalitions formed to act in the name of peace. For my country, the use of force to maintain international peace and security must be authorized exclusively by the Security Council in order to give it the legal authority necessary to prevent any type of excess and abuse.

The leaders of our world Organization and its Member States have always courageously found in the painful events we have faced, as well as in the Charter, the instruments and means to rebound and reform the system to maintain peace. It is hard to speak of the change in our Organization's response to global disorder without highlighting the profound and multidimensional transformations of peacekeeping operations, inspired by the lessons of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia and the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which the Brahimi report (S/2000/809) brought to light. While those responses remain imperfect, they are in many cases the only ones that have saved millions of people and led to success in many countries, including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Haiti.

My country can attest to the effectiveness of the range of provisions of the Charter concerning the maintenance of international peace and security when they enjoy the necessary legitimacy and legality and are accepted in good faith. The success of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, which we celebrated in this Chamber, was the culmination of a process in which all the measures set forth in the Charter and adopted by the Security Council were put into practice in my country. I would point to the most important steps, including a political agreement and the authorization of the parties prior to the deployment of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire; a sanctions regime, including an embargo against arms and diamonds, as well as individual sanctions; the authorization to use force to destroy heavy weapons threatening civilians; and respect for the political agreement and the ballot results certified by the United Nations.

The international peace and security system, derived from the Charter, is at a crossroads. It should provide new responses to global challenges, such as terrorism and climate change. My country calls upon the Council to take stock of its impact on international peace and security. These new developments oblige the United Nations to redefine its functions and methods by focusing on ways to prevent crises, expand partnerships and broaden the scope of its activities for peace and security. As Secretary-General António Guterres underscored,

> "Prevention requires us to address root causes across the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. It must be the priority in everything we do." (*A/71/PV.60, p. 13*)

Côte d'Ivoire believes that the much-needed reform should also involve closer cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, which would be an asset in the fight against terrorism. The Council should provide increased support to entities in that fight, such as the Group of Five for the Sahel and the African Union Mission in Somalia, in which the United Nations is not ready to engage.

In the light of the new challenges facing our States and the role the United Nations must play together with us, there is an urgency to forge ahead with Security Council reform in order to strengthen its legitimacy and its acceptance by all. Only a strong Security Council that reflects today's world will encourage States to shoulder their primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I would like to personally thank the Secretary-General for being here a second day in a row, but, more important, for his comments on Syria. I think that it is time for us to realize that we cannot continue to look away. I very much appreciate him taking the time to make that personal plea. I think it is important for all of us to know. It is certainly an honour to have former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with us today. We welcome him back home and are happy to see him.

I thank Kuwait's presidency of the Security Council for convening today's meeting. It is important that we pause for a moment every so often to reflect why it is we are here and what guides our work. We should start by being honest. There is a lot of lip service paid to the Charter of the United Nations. Everyone claims to be motivated by it and to be acting in accordance with its principles. But all too often Member States invoke the United Nations Charter not to inspire us to act, but to excuse their lack of action. And so we see the Security Council frequently failing to act at the times it is most important to defend the principles of the Charter. However, the United Nations is not simply a collection of nations. The United Nations Charter gives this organ an identity and a meaning of its own. The Charter commits all Members to the pursuit of peace and security based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination. It calls on Members to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. In practice, however, the United Nations has all too often fallen short of that ideal.

Sovereignty is critically important. The United States will never forfeit its sovereign right to govern itself and determine its future. All Member States share that right, but they also struggle to balance their sovereign interests with the need to work cooperatively with other nations. In the United States our Constitution and democratic system of Government bind us to act in the interests of our people. I am accountable to the American people in what I say and do. Governments that are not accountable to their people are less constrained. They often point to sovereignty to justify bad behaviour and claim the Council has no business meddling in their affairs. But sovereignty gives no country the right to trample on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.

Human rights are the Security Council's business. That is so because the United Nations Charter calls on all Members to respect those rights, and also because violations of human dignity inevitably lead to threats to peace and security. Sovereignty is no excuse for a Government to use violence and rape to expel a minority group to a neighbouring country, as the Burmese security forces have done. Sovereignty is no excuse for the Council to do nothing. Sovereignty is no excuse for a regime to gas its own people, as the Al-Assad regime is doing in Syria, or for the Council to do nothing. Sovereignty is no excuse for any dictatorship to abuse its people, spark violence, foment regional conflict and then get off scot-free.

If that were true there would be no reason for us to be here. For the words of the Charter to have meaning all Member States must be accountable and abide by them. For the words of the Charter to have meaning, the Security Council must be willing to act when Member States violate them. The Security Council has done an admirable work to address the threat of North Korea, but too many Member States have failed to abide by their Charter obligation to enforce the sanctions the Council has imposed. In the meantime Pyongyang continues to develop its nuclear arsenal, threaten its neighbours and categorically refuse to discuss denuclearization. We must do better.

For far too long the Council has watched Iran play a deeply destabilizing role in the Middle East, without

addressing the urgent regional threat it poses. In Ukraine Russia remains an occupying force in Crimea and a destabilizing force in eastern Ukraine. Let me repeat: the sovereign rights of nations are fundamental. But when we do not uphold the principle of sovereignty by allowing the Kim, Al-Assad and Putin regimes to act with impunity, just the opposite is true. When the Security Council provides accountability for nations that violate the United Nations Charter, we protect sovereignty. Such was the case in 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. After the invasion, Saddam proceeded to ignore 11 resolutions calling for him to withdraw. On 29 November 1990 the Security Council rightly invoked Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. It gave Saddam Hussein one last chance to do what was right. In January 1991, after he refused to comply, a coalition of 34 countries, led by the United States, began the fight to liberate Kuwait. That coalition's efforts were successful. The proof is in the Chamber today. The sovereign nation of Kuwait presides as President of the Security Council.

I once again thank our Kuwaiti friends for calling today's important meeting. It is a great reminder of the purposes of this body. And I congratulate the entire nation of Kuwait for being a living reminder of what this institution can accomplish when it lives up to the principles of the Charter.

Mr. Tileuberdi (Kazakhstan): At the outset, allow me to start by thanking the delegation of Kuwait for convening today's timely briefing.

Today's theme has been fundamental to the United Nations since its establishment. The purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations remain relevant even in the contemporary history of international relations. More than 70 years ago, the peoples of the United Nations announced their determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. However, the world remains at war today. Around the world, there are approximately 40 armed conflicts of varying intensity. The existence of more than 65 million displaced people and uncontrolled migratory flows constitute a favourable environment for trafficking in human beings and replenishing the budgets of international organized crime and terrorist groups.

All these phenomena are an exorbitant price to pay for States' and Governments' irresponsible behaviour in international relations or for the sake of their own peoples. The violations that we witness overlook or distort our perceptions of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the Organization and international law, which were formulated after the bloodiest war in the history of humankind — a conflict that claimed more than 60 million lives. Today, the world has come closer than ever to the point at which serious international conflicts are ready to erupt. The threats of the use of weapons of mass destruction, the growing rivalry among regional Powers, the high tension among military-political blocs, and the crisis of trust among the key actors in international relations are of very serious concern to us. They underline the need for an urgent and dramatic shift in thinking from high-level dialogue and deliberative platforms to real action.

Kazakhstan's vision of global anti-military measures is set forth in the manifesto of President Nursultan Nazarbayev entitled "The World. The Twenty-First Century". In the manifesto, the idea of a comprehensive programme for achieving a world without conflict by the United Nations centennial in 2045 — "The Twenty-First Century: A World Without War" — was evoked. Given that two of the main purposes of the Charter of the United Nations are to save subsequent generations from the scourge of war and to adopt effective collective measures to prevent and eliminate threats to peace, we must make a determined and concerted effort through the collective and responsible actions of nations to destroy the disease of war and conflict.

At a briefing held in the Security Council on 18 January on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (see S/PV.8160), during our country's presidency of the Council, a broad and useful exchange of perspectives took place. My delegation highlighted the significance of confidence-building measures in achieving peace and security goals, which, in turn, play a key and ever-increasing role in the prevention of conflicts and the resolution of pressing global problems. We know this from our own experience. Indeed, upon the initiative of my country, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, which brings together 26 countries, was established 20 years ago and continues properly to function today. Kazakhstan's efforts in its two-year non-permanent

membership in the Security Council are aimed at practical ways of ensuring international peace and security, in particular through making Central Asia a model regional zone of peace and security, sustainable development and prosperity.

We support a three-part conflict resolution strategy: reconciling peace and security with sustainable development in order to achieve lasting progress, implementing regional responses to such cross-border problems as terrorism, ecological devastation and poverty, and coordinating the interaction of United Nations structures operating as One United Nations so as to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the Organization's activities in the field.

We have at our disposal all the needed and time-tested strategies and best practices to change the world for the better. In this way alone, through responsible and predictable domestic and foreign policies, can we effectively and collectively address the challenges and threats of our times, advancing on the path of creation, progress, economic well-being and international security for all, without leaving anyone behind.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank you, Sir, for focusing the Security Council's attention on the purposes and principles of our Charter of the United Nations. I also thank the Secretary-General and His Excellency the former Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for their briefings today.

Today's meeting, as the President has said, takes place around the twenty-seventh anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait, which was a clear example of the United Nations fulfilling one of its main purposes, namely, to maintain international peace and security. As States Members of the United Nations, we have a responsibility to adhere to the Charter's ideals and to work within the United Nations framework to solve the most challenging global problem. When the horrific violence in Rakhine state forced the Rohingya to flee, the Security Council played a vital role, focusing the world's attention on the situation and encouraging action by the authorities on the ground. We must now take further action to ensure safe and voluntary returns take place, and we should visit the region.

The Council must work together to achieve the Charter's purposes. When we do, we are successful. We have remained united in our commitment to providing the tools to achieve peace in Colombia and in our support for the peace process in Cyprus. We were successful in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. We have remained united in our condemnation of Da'esh and the need for accountability for that group's atrocious actions, and we have remained united in our condemnation of the flagrant violations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of international law, where we have used sanctions to constrain the that country's pursuit of illegal nuclear and ballistic-missiles programmes. In this context, sanctions play a crucial role in maintaining international peace and security. The implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which balances sanctions relief with strict nuclear restrictions, is another significant achievement of the Council and marks a major step forward in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear-weapon capability.

However, there are instances where Council disunity halts our progress. We cannot ignore Russian attempts to redraw the boundaries of Europe. This month marks the fourth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea, in breach of Article 2 of the Charter. We remain deeply concerned by the degradation of human rights in eastern Ukraine, and we call upon on Russia to abide by the Minsk agreement commitments that it has undertaken. It is crucial that we uphold the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Nor can we ignore the conflict that continues to rage in Syria or its causes. The Syrian conflict in all of its abhorrent acts and human misery is an example of what we all set up the United Nations to prevent. We have proved that we can work together to ease the suffering of the Syrian people. When we adopted resolution 2393 (2017), the United Nations was empowered to continue to deliver urgently needed humanitarian aid across conflict lines and borders.

Knowing that we can deliver results makes our failures even more frustrating. These failures are having devastating consequences. The Al-Assad regime's brutal assault of eastern Ghouta, including reports of chemical-weapon use, is causing unprecedented levels of suffering. The targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure is a violation of international humanitarian law. Eastern Ghouta is not a de-escalation zone; it is a zone of death and destruction. We must work together to end the conflict and prevent further suffering of the Syrian people, and I hope the Council will soon be able to pass a resolution to that effect. The Geneva talks represent the only sustainable path to peace. The opposition continues to engage constructively and in

good faith and without preconditions. The Al-Assad regime must do the same.

We must also hold the Syrian regime and others to account for the repeated use of chemical weapons. Our failure here is acceptable. We must demonstrate that such abhorrent actions have consequences. An independent expert international investigation set up by the Security Council concluded that the regime and Da'esh have used chemical weapons. We must not allow Russian actions to force the closure of this investigation to deter us from pursuing accountability.

Despite our differences in the Security Council, we have demonstrated our capacity to show unity in the face of adversity. We must strive to do this more and to think creatively about how we find common solutions. The United Kingdom is a proud signatory to the code of conduct put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, and we are committed to never voting against a credible draft resolution on preventing or ending a mass atrocity.

We fully support the Secretary-General's efforts and proposals to improve the United Nations ability to prevent and respond to conflict and promote development. That includes reforms to peacekeeping, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the millions of military, police and civilian personnel who have helped to protect civilians around the world.

We must also continue to tackle relentlessly the scourge of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, and recognize the disproportionate adverse effects of conflict on women and the important role of women in peacebuilding.

We must encourage increased cooperation with regional organizations and arrangements, as set out in the Charter, whether with the African Union Mission in Somalia in its fight against Al-Shabaab, the Economic Community of West African States in its resolution of conflict, or the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel to combat terrorism in West Africa.

Our predecessors drafted the Charter of the United Nations in the name of the peoples of the world to help save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. In some places, we are succeeding; elsewhere, we are falling woefully short. Let us all reflect on what more we can do to live up ideals of the Charter — our Charter.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China highly commends the Kuwaiti presidency for its initiative to convene today's debate. I warmly welcome the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Sabah, to New York to preside over this meeting.

I wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and welcome back the former Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The United Nations was born in the afterglow of the world victory against fascism. The Charter of the United Nations gave expression to the reflections of peace-loving peoples around the world and carries the optimistic hopes of all nations for peace and development.

Today's world is undergoing profound changes not seen in a century. We should stay true to our agenda, uphold our mission, resolutely safeguard the principles and purposes of the Charter and continue to carry forward the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. We should work together to build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation, and establish a community of shared destiny for humankind. I should like to share the following ideas with the members of the Security Council.

First, countries should build partnerships based on equality, consultation and mutual understanding. Equality in sovereignty is an important norm governing inter-State relations. The sovereignty of countries big or small, strong or weak, poor or rich must be respected. Interference in the internal affairs of other countries must not be permitted. The international community should uphold multilateralism, pursue mutual trust and win-win cooperation, abandon the Cold War mentality and zero-sum games, and act upon the five principles of peaceful coexistence and the Charter of the United Nations in steadily promoting democracy in international relations and in governing global affairs through consultation.

Secondly, countries should strive for a world of universal security through joint contributions and sharing. In the face of traditional and non-traditional security threats, including terrorism, regional conflict, the refugee crisis and climate change, no single country can stand aloof. It is important to foster an outlook of comprehensive, common, cooperative and sustainable security, promote international cooperation across the board, adopt a holistic approach to addressing issues fundamental to world and regional security, and build universal security.

Thirdly, countries should respect the work of the United Nations as the main channel of mediation and safeguard the mission and authority of the Council. The Council, as the collective security machinery for the maintenance of international peace and security, is equipped with a sacred Charter mandate. We should support the Council, acting in accordance with the Charter, in seeking the peaceful settlement of conflict by political means and by fully bridging differences through dialogue and consultation.

As the first signatory of the Charter, a founding Member of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council, China is ready to shoulder all its responsibilities, stay committed to maintaining the international system built around the United Nations, uphold the basic norms governing international relations underpinned by the Charter, work alongside other Member States and the United Nations, and make greater contributions to world peace, common development and international cooperation.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We join others in expressing appreciation to the Kuwaiti presidency for organizing this high-level debate and we are pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over the meeting. At a time when we are facing unprecedented challenges and threats to global peace and security, the need for multilateralism has never been more indispensable to ensuring a collective response.

That is why reaffirming the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations is imperative to preserving the current global order on the basis of renewed partnership, in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We know from history that the League of Nations, the predecessor of the Organization, failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War mainly because its members remained indifferent to the blatant disregard of the purposes and principles of international law governing inter-State relations.

Of course, no one can speak better, more forcefully and with authority on this issue than the Secretary-General himself and his predecessor, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and we thank both of them for their important remarks. We are truly pleased to see Mr. Ban Ki-moon here with us today.

In spite of so many challenges and shortcomings, the United Nations has been and continues to be an indispensable Organization. Its Charter principles and purposes also remain as relevant today as they were 70 years ago in safeguarding international peace and security, promoting respect for human rights, and ensuring sustainable development for all. The issue is how we can apply them in a manner that is consistent with the realities of our time in order to meet the needs and aspirations of current and future generations. That is why we support the reform agenda, in the words of the Secretary-General,

> "to make the United Nations more able to respond to the needs and aspirations of we, the peoples, that generated this Organization".

We are indeed living in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, and what happens in one corner of the world can easily affect us all, whether it is terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change or a health pandemic. No one can be immune from these problems, nor can anyone claim to have the panacea to address them alone. We can do so only if we collectively work together, in line with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

That requires us to carry out our obligations in good faith, and there have no doubt been instances of failure that have tarnished the image and credibility of the Organization and given enough reason to sceptics to be critical. But we should also not forget that there have indeed been instances when the Organization has proved its mettle and defended its principles with vigour. Because of that, a country whose territorial integrity was aggressed 27 years ago, in flagrant violation of the Charter, not only was able to regain its sovereignty but can now contribute its part to the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security.

How symbolic is it, therefore, that today this country is presiding over the work of the Security Council, 27 years after its liberation? We wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the people and the Government of the State of Kuwait on this important occasion. It is indeed a historic coincidence that Ethiopia was a member of the Security Council at the height of the Gulf War and took a principled position based on the United Nations Charter to stand in solidarity with Kuwait, not only to condemn its invasion but also to fully support all the relevant Security Council resolutions aimed at restoring its sovereignty. We should certainly draw lessons from some of the achievements of the United Nations and also have the courage to

admit shortcomings and make all efforts necessary to replace them.

The Security Council has a number of tools, envisaged in the Charter, at its disposal to address the multifaceted problems that the world is facing. Chapter VI of the Charter is clear on the primacy of the peaceful settlement of disputes while being strong on the need to take preventive measures in order to avert conflicts before they erupt.

Chapter VII provides the parameters for action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression, while Chapter VIII provides for regional arrangements. Unfortunately, we have yet to take full advantage of what the Charter can offer to help us overcome the constraints of self-defeating policies based on narrow national-interest calculations, which, ipso facto, lead to double standards that in turn undermine the credibility of the Security Council as the organ with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Here the most critical issue the need is to be consistent in our fidelity to the principles of the Charter: sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-intervention and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Failure to do so can have grave consequences; my own country is witness to this. It is in this respect that I wish to quote Emperor Haile Selassie, who appealed for justice when Ethiopia was aggressed in 1935 but who nonetheless remained unwavering in his commitment to the international collective security system in spite of the utter failure of the then League of Nations. What he said in his address to the General Assembly in October 1963 still resonates today, and it is with those words that I wish to conclude my remarks:

> "The Charter of the United Nations expresses the noblest aspirations of man: the abjuration of force in the settlement of disputes between States ... [and] the safeguarding of international peace and security. But these, too, as were the phrases of the Convenant [of the League of Nations] are only words; their value depends wholly on our will to observe and honour them and give them content and meaning ... This Organization and each of its Members bear a crushing and awesome responsibility: to absorb the wisdom of history and to apply it to the problems of the present, in order that future generations may be born, and live, and die in peace." (*A/PV.1229, p. 1*)

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is grateful to the State of Kuwait for having convened this debate, which affords the States Members of the United Nations a chance to consider and reiterate the importance of the principles of the Charter. This event coincides with the twenty-seventh anniversary of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, in 1991; international cooperation was decisive in the liberation of Kuwait, and we are particularly pleased to see here with us today the Deputy Prime Minister of Kuwait. We would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his incisive intervention and welcome the presence of and the statement made by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the former Secretary-General.

The United Nations as we now know it was born as a consequence of the ravages caused by the Second World War at a time when the devastation caused by that war was still fresh in the collective memory of humankind. It is for that reason that the conviction took root among those who met in San Francisco that there should not be a repeat of the same mistakes that led to two bloody world wars. Both conflicts represented a huge setback for humankind in every respect, and the goal, therefore, was to come up with an appropriate formula to enable the peoples of the world to live together in peace thanks to just rules that would enable them to prosper. The main purpose in drafting the Charter was to achieve a lasting peace for humankind.

In order to achieve the peace and prosperity we so fervently sought, it was vital to establish equitable rules for coexistence within a system in which any problems that might arise could be collectively addressed. The establishment of an Organization such as the United Nations therefore proved justified, as this gave rise to the possibility of holding meetings that would enable us to debate problems that could jeopardize our common coexistence.

His Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea, highlighted the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations in the statement he made during the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, on 21 September:

> "It should be recalled once again that Chapter I of the Charter of the United Nations enshrines the intent of its Member States to build a world of peace and well-being for humanity by encouraging

> friendly relations and mutual respect for the independence and sovereignty of every nation." (*A/72/PV.13, p. 9*)

The words of my President are in line with the Secretary-General's conviction of the importance of collective security as an instrument for prevention and the idea of the urgent need to increase the use of diplomacy for peace. In this paradigm, sanctions, for example, cannot be seen as an end in themselves, and interventions, be they peacekeeping operations or measures geared to re-establishing global order, are but a reflection of the inability of the system and its stakeholders to implement the principles of preventive diplomacy to which the Secretary-General referred.

We cannot deny some of the important achievements and progress recorded by United Nations over its more than seven decades of existence in fostering peace, security and international cooperation. These achievements led to real and irreversible changes in today's world. We as Africans have first-hand knowledge of these achievements, which made a significant contribution to enabling some of our countries to take their rightful place as fully fledged Members of the United Nations after having achieved independence.

The Charter remains a valid instrument that has lost none of its relevance; we must all continue to decisively defend its purposes and principles. International relations, which must be just and democratic, must be underpinned by the principles enshrined in the Charter: equality among countries; respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-interference in the internal affairs of States; and the peaceful settlement of disputes. These principles must continue to be held as sacred and must be defended by all countries.

Relations and interactions among States must be guided by mutual respect, on a basis of equality, so that all can contribute to achieving the common good. Issues of international and regional interest must be addressed through consultation, cooperation and negotiation. Only in this way can challenges such as terrorism, threats to peace, conflicts, disputes between countries and climate change, inter alia, be resolved satisfactorily. Regrettably, we continue to note breaches of the Charter, which weaken the central role that the United Nations must play as a framework for dialogue and diplomacy. To interrupt that trend, it is important to renew multilateralism and a spirit of compromise among Member States and, of course, to insist on the democratization of the Organization's internal structures and processes.

We must not be naive or become complacent. The world is changing, and the Organization must know how to adapt and anticipate such change. The Organization's success and its relevance in a constantly evolving world depends largely on what I have just outlined. The Charter of the United Nations is flexible enough to be able to respond to the complex new challenges before us. However, it is up to us, the Member States, to be brave enough to modernize the Organization's structures and procedures; otherwise, the credibility, legitimacy and moral authority of the purposes and principles of the Charter will be increasingly questioned and undermined.

Developments in the current scenario present a clear challenge for all. International affairs are undergoing a process of change, which, on the one hand, can yield new opportunities for economic cooperation, and, on the other, presents the challenge of having to face security threats and challenges.

Building the global economy, promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty, countering environmental degradation, and so on, are actions that must lead to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which should have a positive impact on the greater well-being of, and equality among, the various peoples of the world. Those needs are most pressing in Africa, the continent that suffers most from the shortcomings of the modern world.

As we have already said, the world is in constant flux and is no longer what it was 70 years ago. That is evident in the nature of armed conflicts, especially their capacity to inflict devastation and suffering. The response of the international community should adapt to the new reality and the challenges we all face. In that process, the role of the United Nations is vital, and its purposes and principles, if used effectively, remain useful.

The world must be guided by the principle of peaceful coexistence in international relations. When it comes to choosing social systems and development models, the unique traits of every country must be respected. The principle of the sovereign equality of all countries must remain intact, international justice and equality must prevail and the rules of international law must always be applied, without double standards.

Equatorial Guinea has had its security threatened on several occasions, the last of which occurred last December. Thanks to international cooperation, which we wish to mention here, we were able to avoid what could have been a true massacre on Equatorial Guinean soil. I therefore conclude my statement by stating that the motto of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea — unity, peace and justice — which guides the actions of our country's foreign policy, is in full accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the convening of this meeting. We are also grateful for the enlightening briefing delivered by Secretary-General António Guterres, and we welcome to New York former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whom we thank for his very valuable presentation. In particular, we welcome the presence of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, and other senior officials.

In view of the growing complexity of the global challenges we face today, Peru believes that strengthening multilateralism and rejuvenating the Organization to make it more coherent and efficient in supporting the maintenance of peace is of the utmost importance. We therefore support the reforms promoted by the Secretary-General, and we encourage him to persevere in that regard. Moreover, we believe that this is a highly opportune moment to reflect on the validity of the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

On this occasion, we will focus on the importance of the principle of the pacific settlement of disputes and on a more active Organization in the promotion of the peaceful means listed in Chapter VI of the Charter: negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement and resort to regional bodies and arrangements.

We welcome the Secretary-General's initiatives in that area, more specifically his mediation and the provision of his good offices in numerous countries, with a view to preventing conflicts and their escalation. We eagerly await the establishment of a high-level consultative council on mediation and the Security Council.

In line with that initiative, Peru encourages the Council to play a more active role in its work to promote and recommend that Member States resort to the peaceful means I have just mentioned, which we are convinced would constitute a major contribution to international peace and security. That conviction is based on our own experience. In its recent history, Peru has resorted to the International Court of Justice, arbitration and negotiations supported by friendly countries to resolve sensitive and complex border disputes with its neighbours — neighbours with whom, now such disputes have been peacefully resolved, we enjoy the best of relations concerning trust and cooperation.

Peru is committed to international law and its progressive development, which is why we are concerned by the unsystematic manner in which the Charter of the United Nations is often interpreted. Such interpretation attributes absolute qualities to certain principles, to the detriment of others. On the one hand, there is often conflict among the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference; and on the other, among those of justice and the fulfilment of the obligations of States in accordance with the Charter itself, including responsibilities in the area of human rights. That usually results in an impasse, which unfortunately hampers the cooperation that is required for the collective security system to develop effective preventive diplomacy in favour of international peace and security.

Given this situation, we must bear in mind that the principles listed in Article 2 of the Charter are geared towards collective action, and that, in that sense, they are complementary. The Charter requires all Member States to cooperate, while respecting their respective areas of sovereignty, to carry out the purposes listed in Article 1.

In that respect and to conclude, we wish to recall that the first purpose enshrined in the Charter is to specifically maintain international peace and security. To that end, the Charter expressly requires us to take effective and collective measures to prevent and eliminate threats to peace.

As was mentioned, this month we commemorate the liberation of your country, Mr. President, which was possible thanks to the Council's response to a flagrant act of aggression, in its implementation of Chapter VII of the Charter 27 years ago. On that occasion, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar drew some important

conclusions from the historic episode and presented them in his annual report. In view of their relevance to a more effective application of Chapter VI of the Charter, I would like to mention some of them here:

> "The hostilities in the Gulf have made it agonizingly clear that the devastation of two States, with untold loss of innocent lives ... damage to the environment and immense suffering of millions, represented a startling failure of collective diplomacy. In the aftermath of these hostilities, therefore, a renewed emphasis is rightly being placed on the need for preventive diplomacy ... Preventive diplomacy presupposes early warning capacity, which, in turn, implies a reliable and independently acquired database. There is a complementarity between the Secretary-General being fully equipped with the means presupposed in Article 99 of the Charter and the Security Council (in conformity with the spirit of Article 34) maintaining a peace agenda not confined to items formally inserted." (*A/46/1, p. 3*)

More than a quarter of a century later, the challenges and threats to peace and security are perhaps more complex, but it is clear that the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter remain valid and relevant.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Kuwait for convening this important debate on the anniversary of its liberation in 1991. This remains an excellent example of how the Security Council shouldered its responsibility by taking collective measures in line with the Charter. The fact that Kuwait just hosted a donor conference on Iraq shows a deep understanding of how the prosperity and stability of ones neighbor contributes one's own security and well-being. Regional cooperation is enlightened self-interest and represents one of the cornerstones of international peace and security.

I should like to pay tribute to the presence here today of former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and all his work to reinforce the values of the Charter. I also want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning. We strongly underscore and echo his call for an urgent cessation of hostilities to allow for humanitarian relief in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria. We are working very hard, together with Kuwait and other States members of the Council, to ensure that we can take a meaningful decision on that issue very soon.

The Charter of the United Nations was adopted in in the shadow of two world wars. At that time, the purpose of the Charter was clear. As Secretary-General Guterres told us when he assumed office: "The United Nations was established to prevent war by binding us in a rules-based international order" (*S/PV.7857, p. 3*). The Charter is the foundation of our collective security system. However, making this system work for all means that every Member State must play its role. It is contingent upon each Member State to abide by and defend the rules-based order prescribed by the Charter. This is not just a question of political will, but a legal obligation.

Under the Charter's provisions much has been achieved, but we must also recognise that for many, the aspirations captured in its purposes and principles — to live in peace and security without violence — remain elusive. The continued aggression and illegal annexation in Ukraine, the intolerable suffering inflicted on the civilian population in Syria, our inability to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the continued violence and humanitarian crises in the conflicts in Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Libya, and the horrendous reports of violations in Myanmar are all an affront to this system.

Under Article 24 of the Charter, the Council — elected and non-elected members alike — acts on behalf of all members of the United Nations and must do so in in accordance with the Charter, its purposes and principles. The permanent members have a special responsibility. That is why the use of the veto to protect narrow national interests in situations of mass atrocities is totally unacceptable. I call on all members to adhere to the code of conduct put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and the Franco-Mexican initiative on restraint in the use of the veto, especially in the event of mass atrocities. In addition, the global world order must be based on a fair and just system in which States have equitable representation. We repeat the need for reform of the Council in order for it to reflect the realities of today's world.

The provisions on peaceful settlement of disputes, as laid out in Chapter VI of the Charter, contain powerful instruments to resolve disputes before they escalate into serious conflicts. I would like to highlight five tools that the Council should make better use of.

The first is early action to resolve conflicts peacefully, in accordance with Article 33. A recent example was the Council's response to the crisis in The Gambia last year. Early and swift Council action contributed to preventing a potential outbreak of violence. A unanimous Security Council, working closely with the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union, adopted resolution 2337 (2017), defending democratic principles. The collective security system worked and the rules-based international order was upheld.

Secondly, the Council should support mediation and good offices in an engaged, supportive and united manner. We welcome the formation of the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, and the Council should examine how it can be supported. Women's meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution is key. The Swedish Women's Mediation Network is contributing to peace processes around the world, and we are happy to bring that experience to the table.

Thirdly, regional organizations are key actors in preventing conflict and the settlement of disputes at the regional level. The Council should make full use of Chapter VIII of the Charter and encourage the settlement of disputes through regional arrangements and be kept informed of how the Council can support regional efforts to prevent conflict. In this context, we welcome regular meetings between the Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council, as well as cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union. The Helsinki process in Europe can serve as a model for building trust and confidence where such assets are missing, such as in the Middle East.

Fourthly, judicial bodies, such as international courts, contribute to resolving disputes based on the rule of law. The International Court of Justice continues to play an important role in this regard. The Council should more actively consider the possibility of recommending referrals to the Court. In addition to the International Court of Justice, the number of dispute settlement mechanisms and resort to such mechanisms are increasing. The International Criminal Court, as a deterrent of international crimes, has a key role in preventing conflict. The decision to activate the Court's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression arises directly from the United Nations Charter.

Finally, we call upon the Secretary-General to make even greater use of his prerogatives, including under Article 99, to bring to the attention of the Council any matter that, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. Of course, we encourage Council members to be responsive to such petitions. The Secretary-General took this step in relation to Myanmar late last year, bringing our attention to the situation there and its potential implications beyond the borders of that country.

Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in 2005 that

> "we will not enjoy development without security, or security without development. But ... we will not enjoy either without universal respect for human rights".

Therefore, the role of the Council in preventing conflicts must be seen within the broader context.

Prevention requires addressing the root causes of conflict and instability long before they reach the Council's agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — with its aim of peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies — together with the sustaining peace agenda, represents the masterplan for prevention. We welcome the joint United Nations and World Bank study *Pathways for Peace* on inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict, and we strongly support the Secretary-General's reform agenda, which aims to put sustainable development, conflict prevention and sustaining peace at the centre of the United Nations work.

Violations and abuses of human rights can be the first indicators of a nascent conflict. Conversely, respect for and the protection of human rights contribute to addressing the root causes of instability, thereby helping to prevent and resolve conflicts and sustaining peace. We fully support the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative as a tool for early warning and prevention.

It is more important than ever for Member States to act on principles and to base their decisions and actions on international law. I would therefore like to conclude by again stressing that the Security Council is central to upholding the rules-based international order, as reflected in the Charter. This means that Member States are expected to act in accordance with the Charter, and that the Council must ensure that

States, as well as individuals, are held accountable for the most serious of violations of the Charter. This wonderful and visionary text — a copy of which I have here in highlighted colour, which I hope will help in its implementation — is still very valid, but we need to make better use of its provisions and the instruments that it offers.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over the Security Council. We know the significance of today's date and that it coincides with a momentous occasion. We are also grateful to the two Secretary-Generals for their participation in today's meeting. I am very happy to see Mr. Ban Ki-moon among us.

We thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's meeting. The topic that you have proposed is extremely relevant within the context of the current state of international relations and the role that the United Nations and Security Council play in that regard.

The purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations — the independence and sovereign equality of States, non-interference in their internal affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes — represent the basis for neighbourly relations among States and their mutually beneficial and constructive cooperation for the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, throughout the history of the United Nations, the world has witnessed numerous examples of open disregard for the Charter, right up to the illegal use of force, blatant interference in the affairs of States, destruction by outsiders of traditional social principles, violent regime change and the imposition of alien cultural and social norms. In order to achieve those ends, we often see the manipulation of concepts such as the responsibility to protect, the rule of law, human rights up front and other intrusive instruments that do not necessarily enjoy consensus support. As a result, the burden on the Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, never lessens. Conflict situations, often provoked from outside, arise with remarkable regularity. At the same time, however, instead of efforts to solve all these problems together, through professional dialogue based on mutual respect and equality, we often see the artificial pumping up of an atmosphere of tension and mistrust. Instead of collective action, we see unilateral measures, economic pressure and threats, including threats of force, none of them methods that are compatible with international law and order.

The reason, as we see it, is quite clear. Some states are finding it difficult to accept the obvious fact that the era of the Cold War, along with the world's post-bipolar stage, is over. The world is in the process of establishing a new, more just, democratic, polycentric world order. Its essence lies in the emergence and strengthening of new centres of economic power and political influence. The fact is that this multipolarity is the embodiment of the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world, of peoples' desire to determine their own destiny and of their natural yearning for fairness. We should be reconciled to the fact that States want to build their own lives without others' prompting or unsolicited advice. Incidentally, I would like to remind Mrs. Haley that there is no regime in Russia. What we have is a legally elected President and appointed Government. I would like to ask the United States delegation to observe at least the most basic diplomatic conventions in future. And, also incidentally, Syria is also a legal Government, whether one likes it or not.

We have seen Yugoslavia and Libya bombed in gross violation of international law and Security Council resolutions and the occupation of Iraq on false pretences. No one took responsibility for any of those criminal acts, despite the international criminal tribunals established by the Council and the experiments whereby cases were transferred to outside structures that preferred to turn a blind eye, shamefully, to all of this, whether the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia or the International Criminal Court. The chaos sown in the Middle East and North Africa enabled the rise of international terrorism and led to the creation of Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Ultimately, the world found itself up against an entire terrorist quasi-State that has brought terror and incalculable suffering. Its final defeat, at enormous cost, has yet to be achieved. And at the same time the question of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity continues to be a bargaining chip in the geopolitical aspirations of a slew of external players. The chaos created in Libya has severely exacerbated the terrorist threat in Africa. When we recall where this crisis originated and who brought democracy to that country with its bombs, they look away in shame. We must consider the consequences of our actions, not live by slogans. We must settle protracted crises and

conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not provoke more and more new ones.

Open incitement from outside led to unconstitutional regime change in Ukraine and the rampant spread of nationalism and neo-Nazism, and to internal armed conflict and huge numbers of casualties in the south-eastern regions of the country. Why, I wonder, did we not hear at the time, in 2014, about the importance of conflict prevention, a subject that is so popular today with a number of delegations? By the way, this very day, 21 February, marks the fourth year since President Viktor Yanukovych and the leaders of the opposition signed an agreement on a political settlement in Ukraine. I would like to remind the Council that the agreement was defied by the opposition members who seized power in Kyiv the very next day, with the silent acquiescence of its guarantors. Russia has a direct interest in ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible and is ready to do everything in its power to achieve that. We are working actively in the contact group in Minsk, in the Normandy format, and we have put forward various initiatives in the Security Council. However, while Kyiv continues to sabotage the Minsk process and sell the world its story of what is happening in Ukraine, and while the Kyiv authorities continue to exploit the support of their patrons, there is little hope for constructive developments.

Today we are witnessing a new phenomenon, on a historically unprecedented scale, of indiscriminate accusations of countries' interference in internal affairs and processes. That is a very convenient way of justifying unlawful acts without bothering to produce evidence, and at the same time making the world forget about one's persistent interference in the affairs of sovereign States.

I would like to remind the Council that in December of last year the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/172, on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, which clearly outlines the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States, the non-recognition of coups d'état as a method of regime change, and the necessity of banishing attempts to exert unlawful pressure, including the extraterritorial application of national legislation, from international relations. An overwhelming majority of the States Members of the United Nations voted in favour of the resolution. It is time to start implementing it, to reject double standards and show a genuine commitment to the system-defining principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which is more essential than ever in today's increasingly complex international relations.

Today a great deal has been said about eastern Ghouta and about the concerns that Member States and the Secretary-General himself have expressed about the situation there. We have a concrete proposal. We would like to ask the presidency to convene an open meeting of the Security Council tomorrow to discuss the situation in eastern Ghouta. I think that it is essential, in view of the concerns that we have heard today and so that all sides can present their views and understanding of the situation and propose solutions to it.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by conveying the call made by Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, for a humanitarian truce in Syria. France firmly condemns the current bombing of eastern Ghouta, where the civilian population are the principal victims, and calls for the Council to adopt the draft resolution prepared by Sweden and Kuwait as soon as possible, in order to enable a cessation of hostilities in Syria. The need for it is urgent and total, since the situation there is as dire as it has been since the tragedy in Syria began.

Let me thank the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council for having convened this debate on a topic that we hold dear, namely, respect for the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations as a central element of the maintenance of international peace and security. This debate is being held at a particularly salient moment — 27 years after the liberation of your country, Kuwait, Mr. President, in which France is proud to have participated. Your presence, Sir, marks the importance of this meeting. Although our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, could not attend, he has asked me to convey to you that he welcomes and fully supports your initiative. I also welcome the Secretary-General and thank him for his briefing. As well, I welcome Mr. Ban Ki-moon and thank him for his briefing.

The maintenance of international peace and security is the primary purpose of our Organization, as enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter, which for more than 70 years is the framework that brings us together and the founding cornerstone of our action. The Charter is the heart and the origin of our system of global governance, which is the foundation for multilateral order — built on the rubble of the Second

World War with the universal ambition, from the beginning, of sustaining peace through a realistic system of rules applicable to all. To quote President Macron in his statement before the General Assembly in September, "in today's world, nothing is more effective than multilateralism." (*A/72/PV.4, p. 8*) Our greatest challenges — the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, climate change, migration, unequal development, massive violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and the new challenges posed by technology — are global and can be addressed only globally on a multilateral basis. It is France's deep conviction that, each time that we accept that the resolution of international crises is taking place outside of the multilateral framework and the system of rules we adopted in 1945, we are allowing the law of the jungle to prevail.

More than 70 years after the signing of the Charter, which instructs us to "take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means", the Council must continue its efforts to fully utilize the tools that the Charter provides us to enable us to fulfil our primary responsibility, namely, the maintenance of international peace and security. In that regard, I would like to highlight three main areas for our current and future work.

First of all, we must make our peaceful settlement of disputes more effective by making conflict prevention a reality. The peaceful settlement of disputes is one of the principal tools of the Charter, as set out in Chapter VI. It plays a key role, particularly when the States involved are willing and able to engage in sincere and constructive dialogue or to resolve their dispute through an independent and impartial body. It may seem self-evident, but Article 33 of the Charter helpfully reminds us that negotiation is one of the main tools for the peaceful settlement of disputes. It regularly yields concrete results in the maintenance of peace and in all domains of international affairs. As a product of long and complex negotiations and fruit of the perseverance of those involved, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, approved by the Council in resolution 2231 (2015), regarding the Iranian nuclear question, is an excellent example. The Colombian peace process is another case in point, in a different framework, of success as a result of the patient work of negotiation and mediation. Indeed, the Charter identifies mediation and conciliation among the tools at our disposal.

In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen that dimension of his work by making full use of his good offices, as well as the mediation mechanisms and expertise in the Secretariat, which France wholeheartedly supports. That mobilization depends on the ability to anticipate and act prior to crises, through early warning and action. The establishment of a High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation is likely to further strengthen the Secretary-General's capacity for action. In many of the issues on the Council's agenda today, the Special Representatives and Special Envoys of the Secretary-General have the primary function of being mediators for complex but necessary negotiations. That applies particularly to Syria, Libya and Yemen today.

Mediation is one of the ingredients of what should be, more generally, a priority — prevention. As the Secretary-General has emphasized since the start of his mandate, we must, collectively, be more effective in preventing the deterioration of situations and the outbreak of conflict and its recurrence. We must mobilize to make that goal a reality. That implies having a proactive and global vision. Mediation can help ease political tensions, but beyond that, we must take into account the multiple factors of fragility, foremost among which are human rights, the economic and social dimensions and the impact of climate change.

Promoting sustainable peace following the twin resolutions of 2016 (Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262) is essential to meeting that goal. The report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and sustainable peace (S/2018/43) is an important contribution to that end, but I also wish to highlight the efforts of Mr. Ban Ki-moon in that connection.

Secondly, we must continue to promote respect for international law and our reliance on international justice, which fully contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes. In that respect, France underlines the essential role of the International Court of Justice, one of the organs established by the Charter to strengthen the international rule of law. We recognize its formidable contribution to this indispensable framework. Through its work, it helps us understand that the rule of law is not limited to the handling of theoretical concepts

and concretely serves the maintenance of peace and international security.

The maintenance of international peace and security cannot be understood without respecting and protecting human rights and international humanitarian law. Yet human rights violations and humanitarian disasters continue in front of our eyes, in an unbearable litany. In Syria, as I stated at the outset, in Yemen, in Burma and in many other armed conflicts, we must take action to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. That is not only a requirement to protect the peoples of the United Nations — as enshrined in the Charter — but it is also the best guarantee that the most reprehensible actions will not be committed during a conflict.

More than ever, we must remember that respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is not a concession or a favour but an imperative. Finally, the fight against impunity is a necessary safeguard to prevent the recurrence of those violations and to ensure that peace and reconciliation are still possible. The international partnership launched on 23 January to combat impunity on the part of those who are guilty of the use of chemical weapons is a reminder of France's decisive role on that issue.

The mass crimes still being committed today shock our universal conscience and remind us of every principle that inspired the drafting of the Charter. Each of those crimes is a collective failure of our responsibility to protect civilian populations. It is due to those collective security failures that France highlights the role of the International Criminal Court, which is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year, so that victims of mass atrocities can find redress and justice.

But the Council also has a role to play in ensuring that such tragedies do not occur. Since 2013, the French President of the Republic has called for a suspension of the veto for mass atrocities — as an expression of the political, voluntary and collective commitment of the five permanent members of the Security Council with regard to their special responsibility. We have taken that initiative with Mexico and more than half of the States Members of the United Nations support that effort and that ambitious and pragmatic reading of the Charter. It is indeed our duty to stress that holding a permanent seat is a responsibility, not a privilege, and implies the exercise of that responsibility in the light of the purposes and principles of the Charter. Allow me, Mr. President, on this occasion, to warmly welcome your country's support for this initiative.

Thirdly, and finally, where circumstances so require, the Council not only has the opportunity but also the obligation to use tools to enforce the purposes and principles of the Charter. Foremost among those tools are peacekeeping operations. Since 1948, 3,438 men and women have lost their lives in such operations, and I want to pay special tribute to their sacrifice today. We are all indebted to them for our safety.

The principles by which the nearly 100,000 peacekeepers around the world today operate are at the very heart of the Preamble to the Charter — to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to work together to maintain international peace and security and to affirm our faith in fundamental human rights. In the face of increasingly complex conflicts, our peacekeeping operations have to carry out difficult yet essential tasks, including, first and foremost, protecting civilians and promoting the political settlement of conflicts. While we have seen peacekeepers succeed in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste, for example, we are aware of the difficulties they have to deal with, and we must work collectively — with troop-contributing countries, the General Assembly, host States and regional organizations — to make peacekeeping an ever more effective tool, strategically and operationally.

In that respect, it is particularly important to support the rise of our regional partners, who have become major players in the resolution of crises. Here again the Charter has proved its foresight, in Chapter VIII. It is through the Council's consolidated and coordinated action with regional organizations on both the political and operational fronts that we will be able to respond to today's challenges to peace and security.

Chapter VII of the Charter offers us another tool that does not require the use of force, by which, of course, I mean international sanctions, and here I want to stress that they are both coercive and incentive. They are intended to be reversible once the targeted individuals and organizations no longer threaten international peace and security or flout their international obligations. In this way, the incentivizing sanctions that the Council imposed on Iran paved the way for resolution 2231 (2015). That shows the strong potential for effective interaction among the various tools available to the Council when they are implemented strategically.

I would also like to point out that the increasingly targeted nature of sanctions against individuals and organizations threatening international peace and security minimizes their impact on civilians. The Council has done a great deal of work in that regard, and the progress in recent years has been remarkable.

Finally, as you said, Mr. President, Kuwait's experience of its liberation in 1991, which resulted from the joint work of many States with the authorization of the Security Council, showed that the use of force, in accordance with the rules of the Charter, is sometimes necessary to uphold international law.

In conclusion, I would like to say that respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter should not be a reason for rejected any reform of it at all. The Charter was reformed in 1965 in order to enable the Security Council to be expanded. It should be reformed again in order to adapt the Council's composition to the realities of the world today, and to ensure a fair representation of emerging Powers, while preserving its executive and decision-making nature. France is in favour of Security Council reform, and our position on it is well known. It includes an expansion of the two categories of members, for which we support adding a permanent seat for the members of the Group of Four and an increased African presence, including among the permanent members.

The new international order, the proliferation of crises and threats and the tragic persistence of the wars and horrors that they leave in their wake — as the situation in Syria reminds us every day — demand that we reform our Organization in order to adapt it to the challenges of our time. That will require the Council to make demands of itself in order to find the means to overcome its divisions, with a view to ensuring that the purposes and principles of the Charter continue to be an effective guide for our action in the service of international peace and security. It is both our shared responsibility and in our common interest.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): On behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I would like to express our sincere thanks to Kuwait for convening this meeting, 27 years after its liberation. I would particularly like to thank the Kuwaiti presidency for supplying my delegation with a number of copies of the Charter of the United Nations with an orange cover, which is the national colour of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We also want to thank the Secretary-General and former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for their briefings. It is a great honour, Mr. President, that you, as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, are presiding over our meeting.

In 1945, the Charter of the United Nations established a new international rules-based order. The Charter protects States against acts of aggression, and the example of Kuwait is a case in point, and especially of the impact that the Council can have when it is united. The Charter provides the conditions for security, safety, human rights and sustainable economic development. It is the foundation of the international legal order, and the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands obliges our Government to promote the development of the international legal order.

The Charter came into being in San Francisco 72 years ago. Edward Stettinius, the Secretary of State of the United States at the time, was one of the key players in the United Nations Conference on International Organization. At the first meeting of the Security Council, he said,

> "Whether it succeeds or not, however, depends upon the manner in which the members of the Security Council discharge the special obligation which they have assumed. This is the obligation to agree so that the Council may be able to act, and act effectively" (*S/PV.1, p. 7*).

Let me repeat what he said. Security Council members have the obligation to agree so that the Council can act effectively, and that obligation is especially for the permanent members of the Council and their use of the veto. In the light of that, I will focus on three important areas where we believe the Council can act more effectively — effective prevention, effective peacekeeping and effective accountability. My first point is about effective prevention.

One of the most effective ways to prevent armed conflict is through the peaceful settlement of disputes. Article 33 of the Charter sets out all the mechanisms at the disposal of the parties to a dispute, including judicial settlement, arbitration and mediation. I vividly recall the 2013 event at the Peace Palace in The Hague on Article 33 in which the Secretary-General at the time, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, participated. The Hague, which is the legal capital of the world, is the proud host of the Peace Palace and home to the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It can achieve

its objectives only when all Member States accept its compulsory jurisdiction, and they should therefore do so, especially the permanent members of the Council. The Council has the tools and responsibility to ensure that parties effectively settle their disputes peacefully. Let us use them.

My second point is about effective peacekeeping. When prevention fails, the Council has the primary responsibility to restore international peace and security. The flexibility of the Charter is demonstrated by the fact that the Council is able to deploy peacekeeping operations, although it does not mention the word "peacekeeping", as such. Today's complex and high-risk environments create new challenges for peacekeeping operations, as the Secretary-General indicated this morning. When we assume the presidency of the Council in March, therefore, we will focus on collective action to improve peacekeeping operations, which will be the theme for our high-level debate on 28 March.

All key players in peacekeeping operations share the responsibility to ensure that peacekeeping operations become more effective. It is the Council's responsibility to provide robust mandates that address the operational challenges in the field. It is also its responsibility to act effectively when host States renege on their commitments, undermine the activities of the United Nations or target their own citizens.

My third point is about effective accountability. Sustainable peace cannot be built on impunity. The Council established the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. It has referred two situations to the International Criminal Court. It has established an independent investigative team for crimes committed in Iraq by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), which we welcome. With those actions, it sent a clear message to victims that justice would be delivered, and to perpetrators that they would be held accountable.

When national Governments fail to ensure criminal accountability, it becomes the responsibility of the Council to provide it. A referral alone is not enough; the International Criminal Court needs the Council's enforcement power when States refuse to comply with its decisions. When large-scale violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law are taking place, Member States expect the Council to act. Investigations of crimes committed by ISIS are not enough. The Council must also ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted and brought to justice.

When chemicals are used as a weapon, the Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should act. A total of 115 Member States, including my country, support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Of course, we also support France and Mexico's initiative on renouncing the use of the veto by permanent members when mass atrocities have occurred. It is our view that Security Council members have an obligation to agree so the Council can act effectively. That applies particularly to the current situation in Syria, as the Secretary-General highlighted today. The human suffering in Syria, especially in Ghouta, must end. We need a cessation of hostilities now. We call the Russian Federation in particular to use its influence and do its utmost to end the hostilities and enable the Council to act effectively. I hope that if we do have a meeting on Ghouta tomorrow, it will lead to effective action by the Council to end the violence.

In conclusion, today marks the twenty-seventh year since the liberation of Kuwait from aggression. It is a powerful example that the Council can be effective when it is united and determined. It can succeed, but only if its members fulfil the special obligation they have assumed. As I just said, it is their obligation to agree so that the Council can act, and act effectively.

Mr. Eelco van Kleffens was head of the Dutch delegation in San Francisco in 1945. He became President of the General Assembly in 1954. He expressed the wish that the United Nations should not limit itself to international peace and security. It should also create international law, an international legal order. The Charter, including the Statute of the International Court of Justice, made his wish come true. The Hague proudly hosts the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and many more international organizations that play a key role in that international legal order. Those institutions are based on the Charter. As one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to promoting and protecting the international legal order and the Charter.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia is honoured to have you here with us, Mr. President, and as the last speaker in today's debate, I thank you for remaining with us until every speaker has taken the floor. My delegation would like to congratulate the Permanent Mission of Kuwait, and, in particular, you, Sir, as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, for taking the initiative to convene the debate on this issue. We would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his statement and to welcome and thank former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement also.

We believe that today's debate on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations is a timely one, because multilateralism is under attack. The international order, based on the sovereign equality of States, our joint participation in our Organization and governance of its system and on our development of common strategies and rules, is under threat. We believe that the effectiveness of our Organization's efforts to protect and maintain international peace and security depends on the level of adherence to, respect for and compliance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as respect for the sovereign equality of States, on the part of each and every Member State. Bolivia reiterates that as a country that respects international law and promotes a culture of peace, it has always advocated for the peaceful settlement of disputes, preventive diplomacy, mediation, the obligation to negotiate, reconciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement as measures that are universally recognized by the international community as effective tools for preventing hostilities, the escalation of violence, war and its terrible repercussions.

The provisions of Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations are crucial to a comprehensive discussion of conflicts and their distinctive features, while respecting multilateralism, the sovereign equality of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs. The role of regional and subregional organizations is also vital to strengthening such efforts. Bolivia categorically rejects the use or threat of use of force under any circumstances. It should be considered as a last resort only when all peaceful means of dispute settlement have been exhausted, in accordance with Chapter VII and in strict compliance with the system of multilateralism that underpins our Organization. However, all of our efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts at the highest level, which are based on the Charter, will fall short if we do not address the root causes of those conflicts, such as colonialism, expansionism, attempts to control natural resources and policies aimed at creating zones of influence or as some call them, one's backyards. It is important to make it clear that interventionist policies and efforts to accomplish regime change exacerbate conflicts.

When a Power claims that its interests prevail over those of the rest of the world and is willing to use its military might to protect those interests, it is clear that we are talking about imperialism, which is at antithetical to international law and the concept of a multipolar world. Unilateral actions in flagrant breach of the purposes and principles of the Charter do not occur only through acts and campaigns for intervention but also with the threat of the use of force. We saw that in our own region not years but just a few days ago, when one Power actually called for a coup d'état, in disregard not only for the equality, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States, but for every fundamental principle of international law.

With regard to implementation of Chapter VII of the Charter, we firmly believe that sanctions cannot be viewed as an end in themselves but must be temporary and preventive. Such measures should not be used as a tool to promote double standards and unilateral political objectives. They should be designed and developed with fair and transparent procedures that clearly establish the conditions to which the States or parties must adhere. Periodic evaluations should also be carried out to take stock of their effects and make the necessary adjustments to modify or lift them based on changes in a situation. We must always seek to have the least possible humanitarian impact on civilian populations, to safeguard their rights and guarantee their well-being. Needless to say, we firmly oppose the implementation of unilateral sanctions.

An additional fundamental element in terms of respecting the purposes and principles of the Charter is maintaining a focus on the specific powers and mandates of each entity of the United Nations, in order to avoid duplication of effort or encroachment on a body's specific mandate. We must also avoid any accumulation of power and the exploitation of any of the Organization's organs, including the Security Council, for political purposes. When we speak of the United Nations, of course, we speak of it in its entirety, and not just of the various bodies that are explicitly discussed

in the Charter but also those that arise from it. When we say, for example, that the Security Council can lay claim to the right to address issues that fall within the purview of the Human Rights Council, we are seeing a very clear example of the manipulation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

As a State that promotes the principles of multilateralism and operates according to them, Bolivia welcomes and appreciates the important work of the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, whose probity and independence are indispensable for guaranteeing peace and security for the international community. The work of the Court must be supported by all States so as to consolidate and strengthen the pre-eminence of international law. Justice exists above all to promote the fraternal coexistence of peoples by emphasizing peace and dialogue rather than the use of force, aggression, invasion or unilateral action.

Bolivia reiterates that the joint work of the Organization and the unity of its Member States are vital to guaranteeing and maintaining international peace and security. The success of our work is measured in terms of the conflicts that we manage to prevent, the dialogues or negotiations that we are able to establish, and the confidence-building measures that we can strengthen. Our failure, on the other hand, will be measured in the unresolved conflicts and interventions by its Member States in pursuit of their own interests at the cost of the lives of millions of innocent people.

In conclusion, the great challenge proposed by the Charter of the United Nations is as valid today as it was more than 70 years ago. The primacy of politics, of the use of peaceful means for resolving disputes, and of international law are intimately and indissolubly linked to respect for the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8186

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8186th meeting
Thursday, 22 February 2018, noon
New York

President:	Sheikh Al Sabah	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 12.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Lowcock is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: My colleagues and I have given the Security Council a lot of updates on the situation in eastern Ghouta over the past three months. I want to start today by bringing members some voices directly from eastern Ghouta. The Office of the Special Envoy in Geneva has, just in the past three days, received thousands of messages on instant messaging applications from civilians there. They are pleading for help. Here is one of them, from a humanitarian worker in the area — a person well versed in international humanitarian law:

> "During the past two months, military operations turned into a process of systematic targeting of civilians. Most air raids have intentionally targeted civilian residential buildings. Whole families have died under the rubble. Today, and as battles intensify, I call on you, as a father now expecting my first child to be born, and as a humanitarian worker trying to maintain what is left of life, to act to stop the systematic operations against civilians and open the roads for humanitarian assistance."

Here are more voices.

> "There are entire families being targeted. A mother and her three children. Four pregnant women; one died, another is in a critical condition, the third lost her baby, and the fourth is under observation. A young girl lost both eyes, and it is continuing."
>
> "We do not want war, we do not want war, we do not want war."
>
> "Can you hear our messages, voices and fear?"
>
> "Our situation is so tragic. Our basements are not safe and lack basic needs. Help us, be with us."
>
> "Instead of saying 'no more', the world is saying 'one more.'"

As representatives of Member States, all here aware that their obligations under international humanitarian law are just that — they are binding obligations. They are not favours to be traded in a game of death and destruction. Humanitarian access is not a nice-to-have; it is a legal requirement. Counterterrorism efforts cannot supersede the obligation to respect and protect civilians. They do not justify the killing of civilians and the destruction of entire cities and neighbourhoods.

The Council has been briefed in minute detail, month after month, on the scale of the suffering of the Syrian people. Our reports have indeed been endless: dead and injured children, women and men; airstrikes, mortars, rockets, barrel bombs, cluster munitions, chemical weapons, thermite bombs, suicide bombs, snipers, double-tap attacks on civilians and the essential infrastructure they depend on, including hospitals and schools; rape, illegal detention, torture, child recruitment and sieges of entire cities reminiscent of medieval times.

Over the past 24 hours, heavy shelling and aerial bombardment of multiple communities in eastern Ghouta have reportedly continued, resulting in the deaths of at least 50 people and wounding at least 200. According to some sources, the total death toll since 19 February is close to 300 people. Twenty-three attacks on vital civilian infrastructure have been reported since 19 February. At least seven health facilities were reportedly hit on 21 February. The only primary health-care centre in Modira town was reportedly rendered out of service by airstrikes. A hospital in Duma city sustained significant damage from nearby barrel bombs. Also in Duma city, an obstetrics centre was damaged A hospital in Jisrein town was reportedly attacked, resulting in the death of a nurse. The two Syrian Arab Red Crescent centres in Duma city and Harasta town were reportedly damaged

by the bombardment. Meanwhile — and this is also a point I have consistently emphasized — mortar shelling from eastern Ghouta is reportedly killing and injuring scores of civilians in Damascus city, too.

Members all know the statistics of this conflict. They know that half the Syrian population has either fled the country or faced repeated internal displacement. These people have lost everything. They have seen their homes destroyed, their neighbours killed, their loved ones disappear. Everyone knows that the repeated confirmed or alleged chemical attacks in Syria have killed and terrorized Syrian civilians.

Eastern Ghouta is a living example of an entirely known, predictable and preventable humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes. Everyone knows that nearly 400,000 people are besieged and that they have been besieged for more than four years. Everyone knows that in eastern Ghouta thousands upon thousands of children are facing acute malnutrition the likes of which we have not seen elsewhere in Syria since the onset of the conflict. Everyone knows that more than 700 people are in need of urgent medical evacuation to hospitals just miles away in Damascus city.

We have all seen in recent days the images of bombs and mortars raining down on bakeries and medical facilities. According to reports documented by United Nations human rights colleagues, at least 346 civilians have been killed since the beginning of this month and close to 900 people have been injured. Members all heard the Secretary-General yesterday, in the Chamber, describing eastern Ghouta as "hell on Earth" and saying that we cannot "allow things to go on happening in this horrendous way". They also heard him pleading for "the immediate suspension of all war activities in eastern Ghouta" (*S/PV.8185, p. 2*).

Earlier this week, UNICEF issued a blank statement, as it could no longer find the words to describe the brutality of this war. Its only message was that "no words will do justice to the children killed, their mothers, their fathers and their loved ones."

This appalling violence is happening as we face significantly increased constraints on our ability to reach people trapped behind conflict lines. In recent months we have encountered greater difficulties in accessing people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, particularly through cross-line convoys, than during any period since 2015. Since 1 December, for nearly three months, we have been able to deploy only three cross-line convoys, reaching just 67,200 people. Only 7,200 of those people were in besieged areas, less than 2 per cent of the overall besieged population. In 2017, through November, approximately 53 cross-line convoys reached people in need, an average of nearly five convoys per month. A cumulative total of nearly 2 million people were reached in the first 11 months of 2017, or around 175,000 people per month. Therefore in 2017 we reached 175,000 a month; in the past three months we have reached 22,000 a month. Those are not reports or allegations. We have complete, factual information on this, because they are our convoys.

Moreover, the 2017 access levels were themselves nearly 40 per cent below our access levels in 2016. Access is not only limited on aid deliveries, but we are also seeing growing challenges to our ability to independently assess needs on the ground and to monitor aid delivery.

When an entire generation is robbed of its future, when hospital attacks have become the new normal, when sieges of entire cities and neighbourhoods have become a lasting reality for hundreds of thousands of people, the international community must take urgent and concrete action. I have said this before and I will say it again. What we need is a sustained cessation of hostilities, and we need it desperately — a cessation of violence that will enable the immediate, safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services, the evacuation of the critically sick and wounded and an alleviation of the suffering of the Syrian people.

The Council can still save lives in eastern Ghouta, and elsewhere in Syria. I urge it to do so. Millions of battered and beleaguered children, women and men depend on meaningful action by the Council.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to you, Mr. President, for the prompt response to our delegation's proposal to convene a special meeting on the situation in eastern Ghouta, in Syria. That certainly does not mean that other problematic areas require any less attention. In particular, not long ago, at our initiative, the Security Council discussed the dire situation in Raqqa in detail.

And in general, over the past month we have revisited Syria's humanitarian issues more than once. I would like to ask Council members to listen carefully to what I have to say.

It is past time to discuss frankly what is going on in this Damascus suburb. The mass psychosis in global media outlets of the past few days, working in coordination to circulate all the same rumours, is certainly not contributing to an understanding of the situation. When eastern Aleppo was in the news, propagandistic disaster scenarios were put forward for it — a city where, after it was liberated from the terrorists, warehouses full of medicines and medical equipment were discovered. At the time we demanded that the Secretariat conduct an investigation, but the report presented to the Security Council was blatantly superficial.

We are constantly seeing images of the activities of the White Helmets, who pass themselves off as rescuers. They were long ago shown to be supported by generous foreign assistance, and they work closely with terrorist groups. As a general rule, they serve as the original sources of well-rewarded disinformation. We are given the impression that the whole of eastern Ghouta consists of nothing but hospitals and that it is the hospitals that the Syrian army is attacking. That is a well-known tactic in information warfare. It is a very well-known fact, however, that the militants everywhere make a habit of locating their military facilities in medical and educational institutions, but for some reason that inconvenient truth is not advertised.

It would be a good idea to begin with the fact that there are still several thousand defiant militants in eastern Ghouta, including some affiliated with terrorist organizations, mainly Jabhat Al-Nusra. Some time ago, they breached the agreement on a cessation of hostilities with an attack on an armoured tank unit of the Syrian armed forces in Harasta. They are shelling Damascus, and the intensity of the attacks increases daily. Dozens of missiles are launched every day, and not a single area of the capital has been spared. For some reason, those statistics are not being taken into account by United Nations representatives, although the Permanent Mission of Syria distributes them regularly. We have pointed out that in a 20 February statement, an official representative of the Secretary-General described factual information as "reported" (see S/PV.8183). And today the Under-Secretary-General talked about reported shelling. But those reports could easily have been verified by United Nations staff if they had inspected the areas of destruction and visited the victims.

The Russian Embassy facilities have been repeatedly shelled, and each time the same delegations in the Security Council have made up excuses to lay off the blame for these terrorist acts. One is compelled to conclude that someone is purposely helping the criminals avoid accountability. Incidentally, we are disturbed by the fact that not so long ago, representatives of some delegations who view themselves as leaders in the protection of human rights and international humanitarian law quite seriously said that the damage resulting from the shelling in Damascus did not reach a level deserving of the attention given to eastern Ghouta. Our immediate response was to ask how many people have to die to attain, as it were, the gold standard of sympathy? There has been no answer. Is it appropriate to pass over the tragedies in Ramadi, Fallujah, Mosul and Raqqa in silence while drumming up hysteria about Madaya, Daraya, eastern Aleppo and eastern Ghouta, encouraging militants to to further humiliate civilians?

Incidentally, the coalition forces' methodical destruction of Raqqa is extremely recent. The memory of it is hardly likely to have faded so quickly. For some reason, when the Coalition bombing flattened Raqqa, no one sounded the alarm, demanded compliance with international humanitarian law or proposed an immediate ceasefire. Yes, the Coalition smoked the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) out of Raqqa. We know that. But with that done, the United States has forgotten about the city. No one is clearing any mines there. Who is aware of the fact that as many as 50 returning civilians are blown up by mines in Raqqa every day? Nor do we see much enthusiasm from these famous activists about the worst humanitarian crisis of our time, which happens to be unfolding against the backdrop of the armed conflict in Yemen.

The militants have turned the people who are left in eastern Ghouta into hostages who are not allowed to leave the area under rebel control through the Al-Wafideen checkpoint. The Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has urged the illegal groups to lay down their arms and resolve their status, but they broke off negotiations yesterday, on 21 February. It is quite obvious that they do not care about the life and safety of the residents of eastern Ghouta, whom they use as human shields to hide behind. Their aim consists of continuing to negotiate

tactical and logistical advantages for themselves. That does not seem to particularly worry these groups' foreign sponsors, who might be able to exert crucial influence on them. But no, they would rather maintain the status quo and organize loud campaigns blackening Syria and Russia.

Energy is also being wasted on fragmenting the international efforts regarding a settlement in Syria. Instead of giving due backing to the Astana de-escalation process and the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, which have become an important support to the inter-Syrian negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, we see ongoing backroom efforts designed to openly undermine the work being done through those platforms. On top of that, exclusive clubs are being created, one striking example of which is the so-called International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which undermines the established frameworks for international cooperation on non-proliferation. We know that preparations are being made for an unofficial presentation of that initiative in Geneva. We would like to reaffirm our position in that regard, which is that in view of the neutral status of respected international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, representatives of their secretariats should not be associated with narrow initiatives such as these, which do not enjoy universal support.

Many are now asking the logical question of how de-escalation in eastern Ghouta and other problematic areas of Syria can be achieved as soon as possible. The delegations of Sweden and Kuwait have come up with their recipe for this, in their role as informal monitors of the humanitarian dimension of the Syrian conflict in the Security Council. Their draft resolution — which has now been officially prepared for a vote, despite the fact that the authors know perfectly well that there is no agreement on it — proposes an apparently simple idea, which is the establishment of a ceasefire throughout Syria for not less than 30 days. We would very much like to know how such a truce will be guaranteed, but we have had no intelligible answers. The important thing, they say, is adopting the decision, and we can come up with the details later. An issue as complex as the Syrian conflict does not respond to such logic. We have been through this before, including, once again, in the case of eastern Aleppo.

In principle, a ceasefire would be extremely significant, and not just for ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid. The challenge is in how to achieve it. What we need here is not resolutions for the sake of resolutions, but measures that correspond to the realities on the ground. We are constantly talking about ensuring that the Security Council agrees on feasible decisions that are not divorced from reality or that cater to populist demands. This is about the credibility of the principal organ of the United Nations, responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter, whose purposes and principles we were discussing only yesterday. If we could stop the violence in crisis zones with resolutions, we would already be living in a completely different world.

It will take long and hard work with the sides to the conflict to stabilize the situation so that the parties can sit down at the negotiating table and come up with the parameters for a ceasefire. There is no other way. It will also be impossible to ensure on paper that in 48 hours, or any other amount of time, humanitarian convoys can get going and mass medical evacuations begin. By the way, specific parameters for normalizing a number of complex issues are currently being formulated in Geneva, including by using the potential of the specialist International Syria Support Group. They include the Rukban camp for displaced persons — where, we understand, the United States military presence occupying the area has finally given the United Nations written guarantees — the Yarmouk camp, where the ISIL terrorists still have a presence, and the Fua and Kefraya enclaves.

In that connection, I would like to know if the authors of today's initiative genuinely do not understand its utopian nature or if there is some other purpose at work here that has nothing to do with a desire to help struggling Syrians. Unfortunately, the story of eastern Aleppo in 2016 suggests that the second is true, and that the aim is to start a fight so as to strengthen international pressure on the Syrian authorities and slander Russia. Besides that, it shifts the focus from the importance of reviving the Geneva process as quickly as possible on the basis of the agreements that the Syrians arrived at in Sochi to indiscriminate accusations against the Syrian Government. Will that improve Geneva's chances of success?

I will say it again to make sure that everyone hears it one more time. Russia will continue to do everything

possible to achieve peace in Syria and restore stability to the Middle East. We call on our partners to do the same in a spirit of constructive cooperation and in cooperation with the United Nations, rather than continuing to sow confusion, ramp up support for jihadists and tear the region apart. For this draft resolution to be meaningful and realistic, the Russian delegation has prepared some amendments to it that we will now circulated to Council members.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for calling for a meeting on the horrendous situation in eastern Ghouta, and Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing. I will now make some brief remarks on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait.

In seven years of war, the situation in the besieged area of eastern Ghouta has never been worse. I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for another briefing reminding us of the horrific reality for citizens in eastern Ghouta and of the Council's responsibilities. Yesterday, in this Chamber, the Secretary-General said that the 400,000 inhabitants of eastern Ghouta live in hell on earth. His appeal to all of us in the Council was to act — to immediately suspend all war activities in eastern Ghouta, allowing for humanitarian aid to reach all of those in need, allowing for the evacuation of the hundreds of people that need urgent treatment and that cannot be provided for and allowing the possibility for other civilians to be effectively treated. I want to take this opportunity to remind all parties, as Mark Lowcock just did, of their obligations under international law to protect civilians and hospitals and other medical facilities.

The co-penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, have put forward a draft resolution to respond to the constant legitimate calls from the United Nations for a nationwide cessation of hostilities for 30 days in order to allow for humanitarian access and emergency medical evacuations. Our draft resolution also calls for the lifting of the siege directed against eastern Ghouta. We plead to all Council members to come together to support the draft resolution and to urgently adopt it so that we can halt the incessant attacks against eastern Ghouta and beyond, and we can avert a situation that is beyond words in its desperation.

We, Sweden and Kuwait, furthermore urge the parties to the de-escalation agreement in eastern Ghouta to comply and implement it. We call upon the Astana guarantors — Russia, Iran and Turkey — to spare no effort and bring all their influence to bear on the parties to that end to avert the human disaster unfolding before our eyes.

In response to our Russian colleague on our draft resolution, the United Nations convoys and evacuation teams are ready to go, subject to standard security procedures. The draft resolution that we are putting forward is not a comprehensive peace deal. Its aim is a much-needed humanitarian pause for an initial period of 30 days. There are already ceasefire agreements in force for the areas where fighting has escalated the most recently. They must be complied with. There are existing monitoring mechanisms that can be utilized. The role of the Council, I believe, is to push the parties to the conflict to comply with the proposed cessation of hostilities. Compliance is on the shoulders of the parties. I think that we can make a difference, and I think that we are tested today — not just as Ambassadors representing our countries, but as human beings. That is a massive responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing today. The remarks in Mr. Lowcock's statements are in line with the Secretary-General's remarks yesterday morning (see S/PV.8185) — that eastern Ghouta can wait no longer. There is tremendous suffering there, with 400,000 people who are living hell on Earth.

We support all what the Permanent Representative of Sweden, Mr. Skoog, said in his statement on behalf of Kuwait and Sweden as co-penholders of the humanitarian dossier in Syria. It is unfortunate that the number of people killed since the beginning of this month in eastern Ghouta has reached 1,200 civilians. The international community is silent; it stands still. The question here is: How long we are going to remain silent? How many more civilians, women, children and elderly must die or be displaced until the international community starts taking action and speaking in one voice and saying enough — enough carnage and grave violations of human rights law and international human law? In that regard, I would like to make the following points.

First, Kuwait and Sweden, in response to the clear-cut demands of the United Nations on the humanitarian situation in Syria, have jointly submitted a simple and clear draft resolution that demands a cessation of hostilities across Syria for a 30-day period in order for the United Nations and its partners to be able to deliver humanitarian aid and services and provide critical medical evacuation to the sick and wounded, in accordance with the provisions of international law, and end the blockade on residential areas.

Secondly, action on the part of the the State of Kuwait is based on our religious and national duty to our brothers in Syria. We have a legal, human and ethical responsibility to end their suffering. In that connection, we call on all Member States to support the draft resolution and vote in its favour. We should rise above our political differences to protect civilians.

Thirdly, a failure to ende the systematic and horrendous carnage and bloodshed that has continued for seven years with various weapons would only serve to encourage the perpetuation of such crimes without accountability, as those who commit them are heartened by impunity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing, particularly his noting of the systematic targeting of civilians in eastern Ghouta and the toll that it is taking on the people there.

Yesterday, Russia's Permanent Representative requested this meeting in order to "make sure that all parties can present their views". The view that Mr. Lowcock presented today is, as the Secretary-General said and others have repeated, one of hell on Earth for the people of eastern Ghouta. I would also like to share the vision of some of the people of eastern Ghouta.

Bilal is 22 years old, with a wife who is five months pregnant. He says, "We are waiting our turn to die; this is the only thing I can say". Abdullah is a construction worker, with a wife and six children. He says,

> "Bombs were falling everywhere near our house. We have been spending the last week digging into the rubble of nearby areas with our bare hands."

Malik is a doctor treating the wounded. He says,

> "The hospitals have been overflowing with blood. We are doing what we can to help, but the situation is becoming unbearable."

Those are just a few of the overwhelming number of horrific stories coming out of eastern Ghouta everyday. The pictures and videos are everywhere — screaming parents digging through rubble to find their children; doctors working frantically with no medicine and no equipment in underground hospitals to save whoever they can. Those are not terrorists showing up in these makeshift emergency rooms — they are civilians. They are ordinary people, under attack by a barbaric Al-Assad regime that is bent on levelling eastern Ghouta to the ground, with no regard for the 400,000 men, women and children who live there.

No one needs to use their imagination to know what the Al-Assad regime is planning. It is exactly what we saw in Aleppo in 2016, and in Hama and Homs before that. The Al-Assad regime wants to bomb or starve of all of its opponents into submission. That is why, except for two small deliveries of aid, the regime has not allowed any medical convoys or deliveries of food into eastern Ghouta since November, and the bombing attacks have been relentless. The regime wants to keep bombing and gassing these 400,000 people, and the Al-Assad regime is counting on Russia to make sure the Council is unable to stop their suffering.

Yesterday the Russian representative asked for the parties to present their views, and has put forward a deeply cynical one today. Those present have now also heard from the United Nations humanitarian leader and from people, like Bilal, Abdullah and Malik. The assault from the regime is relentless, and the suffering is overwhelming. The Russian Permanent Representative also asked that we "come up with ways of getting out of the situation." Yet it appears to be intent on blocking any meaningful effort to do so.

None of us on the Council need to look very far for the way out. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our colleagues from Kuwait and Sweden, the way is sitting in front of us. We have a draft resolution establishing a 30-day ceasefire to help shield the people of eastern Ghouta and allow for deliveries of food and medicine to arrive. All 15 of us have spent the past three weeks negotiating that text, patiently attempting to work with each other, including the Russian delegation. We believed we had an agreed text. There are no surprises here. The United

States is ready to vote on the draft resolution — right here and right now. All of us should be ready. Sweden and Kuwait have consulted everyone on that text. They have done their part. There is no reason to delay. Literally, the minute this meeting ends, the Council can take the clearest possible step to help — vote for a ceasefire and vote for humanitarian access.

What the people of Eastern Ghouta need is not complicated, and do not just take our word for it. The International Committee of the Red Cross head of delegation in Syria summed it up, "This is madness and it has to stop". The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid, asked,

> "How much cruelty will it take before the international community can speak with one voice to say enough dead children, enough wrecked families, enough violence, and take resolute concerted action to bring this monstrous campaign of annihilation to an end?"

UNICEF can hardly put words on a page. All UNICEF said in a haunting statement was, "No words will do justice to the children killed, their mothers, their fathers and their loved ones". The Secretary-General made his point clearly yesterday. He supports the cessation of hostilities because eastern Ghouta cannot wait.

Yesterday Russia's Permanent Representative asked what we should do about eastern Ghouta. The people of eastern Ghouta, United Nations officials, humanitarian and human rights leaders and, indeed, pretty much the entirety of the Council have answered: stop the bombing of eastern Ghouta and allow medical assistance in. The rest of the Council is ready to act. We urge the Council to move forward with the ceasefire and humanitarian draft resolution immediately.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Russia for its initiative in convening this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing.

Recently, the security situation in parts of Syria, including its capital, Damascus, and the eastern Ghouta region, has escalated, causing significant civilian casualties, which is drawing broad attention from the international community. China would like to express its profound sympathy to the Syrian people for their suffering. We condemn all acts of violence that target civilians and civilian facilities and harm innocent lives. China has always believed that there is no military solution to the Syrian issue; it would only aggravate the suffering of the Syrian people. A political settlement is the only way out.

The present situation is now such that the international community needs to support the Syrian parties in the resumption of dialogue and negotiations under the United Nations mediation as soon as possible and in seeking a solution that is accepted by all parties through a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process. That is the only way to fundamentally ease the humanitarian situation in Syria and rid the Syrian people of their suffering at an early date.

Terrorist organizations are still launching attacks in Syria, which have caused significant civilian casualties and impeded humanitarian relief efforts by the United Nations. The international community should strengthen its cooperation on counter-terrorism, adopt unified standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations designated as such by the Security Council.

As part of the Syrian issue, the humanitarian aspect in the country is closely linked to Syria's overall situation, in addition to its political process. Actions taken by the Security Council on Syria's humanitarian issue should not only help ease the overall humanitarian situation in the country, but also help consolidate the momentum for a ceasefire in Syria and be conducive to the bigger picture of a political settlement to the issue. China calls upon the Security Council to remain united on the issue of Syria, speak with one voice and create favourable conditions for substantive progress in Syria's political process at an early date.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his enlightening briefing of the situation of the inhabitants of eastern Ghouta. Mr. Lowcock has said it all — the torrent of fire that is indiscriminately falling eastern Ghouta is relentlessly pushing the limits of horror and human suffering. There are no words to describe what is taking place in eastern Ghouta as we speak.

The regime is not merely bombing its own people. It is methodically targeting hospitals and vital infrastructure for the population with the macabre aim of ensuring that the injured who have not perished during the shelling do not survive the wounds inflicted upon them. We must insist that the attacks against hospitals and health-care personnel constitute war crimes, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

The reports we have received from non-governmental organizations and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights are unbearable. Twenty eight attacks struck 20 hospitals in eastern Ghouta since January. More than 700 individuals are in need of urgent medical evacuation. Those evacuations are systematically blocked by the Damascus regime, which has been the case for months. More than 400,000 people, including 130,000 children, have been besieged for months by the regime as part of a siege that is reminiscent of the Middle Ages.

We should make no mistake: the Syrian regime and its allies are brandishing the fight against jihadist fighters, the need for which no one is disputing, as justification of an offensive aimed at entirely different goals. Its real intentions are indeed to annihilate any and all opposition and break the morale of civilians by indiscriminately massacring them. The offensive against eastern Ghouta, which has seen an unbridled acceleration in recent years — the worst of which is undoubtedly yet to come — has added to both the methods and consequences of the new Aleppo. Let us recall that in that city the intensification of bombing preceded a reconquest operation and unknown levels of violence that never sought to shield civilians or rule out the use of chemical weapons. We shall be particularly vigilant on the latter.

Yesterday, through President Macron, France emphatically condemned the indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and civilian infrastructure. We called for the immediate establishment of a ceasefire to enable medical evacuations and humanitarian access to the people. The Secretary-General also spoke resolutely along the same lines. As was recalled this morning by the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, any lack of action is an indication of guilt. We must act swiftly, for the Council has the means at its disposal, if the willingness is put forth.

Sweden and Kuwait, the commitment of which France commends, have proposed a draft resolution demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities to enable humanitarians to evacuate the wounded and gain access to the people. The draft resolution before us does not seem to me to be a political judgement. It conveys the humanitarian imperative that, as such, must bring us together. Accordingly, we have noted Russia's intention to propose changes to the draft resolution. We will consider them, but it is crucial that we quickly adopt the draft resolution so that a cessation of hostilities takes place immediately, as addressing the situation on the ground is of the utmost urgency.

A cessation of hostilities is not a concession. It is the minimal form of response to the repeated requests of the United Nations and humanitarian actors, which have been communicated by members of the Council. Subsequently, it is up to the regime's supporters to ensure full respect and to respond to all calls for access to humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations under international humanitarian law. It is inconceivable to us that a Council member could be opposed to that.

At the same time, we must — and France stands ready to — redouble our efforts to establish a neutral environment that will allow for a credible political process and the holding of elections in Syria. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, France has consistently advocated for the priority of achieving a negotiated solution to the military situation and of finding a political solution that satisfies the aspirations of the Syrian people, ensures lasting peace and stops terrorism in its tracks. France will not deviate from the road map adopted by the international community. We have already said, and will say once again, that only a political, inclusive solution, established under the auspices of the United Nations through enabling a political transition within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), will end the suffering of the Syrian people in a credible and lasting manner.

I should like to conclude with both a warning and an appeal. Not only has the situation in Syria reverted to the tragic darkest hours of the crisis, but, if we fail to react robustly and immediately — let us make no mistake — the worst is yet to come. The worst is the endless escalation of the humanitarian crisis that is crushing the people, any semblance of humanity and the very values underpinning the United Nations. A widespread ground campaign directed against eastern Ghouta might well be the next deadly stage. The worst is also the expansion of the conflict. The combination of circumstances before us today might lead to a potentially major regional or even international confrontation. That risk must be taken very seriously.

In the name of our shared values and interests, I call on every member of the Council to join and act together. We owe that to the civilians who are dying by the hundreds in the hell in eastern Ghouta. We owe it to the security of the region and of the world, which

we have the collective responsibility to protect. We owe it to upholding the credibility of the United Nations, which is our shared heritage. Let us beware that the Syrian tragedy does not also become the grave of the United Nations.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing today on the tragic situation facing the more than 400,000 people living in eastern Ghouta and in other cities.

We heard with dismay that, in that area, the basic principles of international humanitarian law and human rights continue to be disregarded. That has been evidenced by the incessant and merciless bombardments resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties — many of whom are women and children — on a daily basis. Far from decreasing, the bombardments have intensified over the past several days and weeks, as has been the case with regard to the number of people with urgent medical issues who are dying because they cannot be evacuated. We deeply regret that humanitarian convoys are unable to reach besieged and difficult-to-access areas, such as eastern Ghouta, among others, despite repeated appeals from the United Nations and various countries, including Peru, to facilitate immediate, safe and unrestricted access in eastern Ghouta, as well as other areas of Syria.

All those facts, which are ultimately allowing for and fuelling a hell on Earth, as the Under-Secretary-General just pointed out to us, warrant our strongest condemnation. We must remind all parties, including the Syrian authorities, of the responsibility to protect the civilian population. The United Nations has determined various actions that can be taken to alleviate the suffering of civilians in eastern Ghouta and other affected areas. We stress the importance of the immediate implementation of a 30-day cessation of hostilities to allow for providing aid and setting out and implementing the humanitarian assistance response plan and the five priorities that Mr. Lowcock mentioned. Those are all indispensable and urgently needed measures that Peru fully supports.

Implementing them will require a genuine political will to reverse direction and turn them into a reality. Accordingly, we thank Sweden and Kuwait for their generous efforts to reach a consensus on a draft resolution on a cessation of hostilities, which we hope can be adopted as soon as possible. It is of the utmost importance that Council members, in particular those who are able to exercise their influence on the ground, show the world their unity, sense of duty and willingness to compromise, and that we send a clear signal that prioritizes human beings over other interests.

The Council must be able to rise to the occasion and fulfil its sensitive and important responsibilities. All can count on my delegation's commitment to carrying out actions that will alleviate the human suffering in eastern Ghouta and throughout Syria.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): We thank the presidency for convening this meeting, and I thank Mark Lowcock for his sobering briefing. I will address the following three points: first, the escalation of violence in eastern Ghouta; secondly, international humanitarian law; and, thirdly, action by the Security Council.

First, with regard to the escalation of violence in eastern Ghouta, we are meeting at a moment of grave distress for the people in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria. We have seen the extreme escalation of violence in Idlib and eastern Ghouta, which was initiated a few weeks ago by the Syrian regime and its allies. That has severely intensified over the past several days and continues without pause, as Mark Lowcock clearly described. We condemn all indiscriminate attacks directed against civilians. Communities in eastern Ghouta have experienced the most intense bombardments since the beginning of the siege in 2012. Mortars are also being fired into Damascus. Families do not have a safe place to hide. Women and children are dying. Last Monday, the United Nations reported, over a period of just 13 hours, at least, 92 civilian deaths in eastern Ghouta, and the total death toll since Monday appears to stand now at approximately 300.

We continue to receive reports of attacks on hospitals and of the renewed use of chemical weapons, thereby leading to the inhumane suffering of civilians and those who try to help them. We pay tribute to the humanitarian efforts of the White Helmets. We condemn targeted attacks against them. While the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian-populated areas continues, desperately needed humanitarian aid, including medical aid, for the people of eastern Ghouta cannot be delivered. We condemn the incessant violence and the barbaric tactics of besiegement. We have seen those tactics before. If we think back to Aleppo in December 2016, the same scenario took place. The regime turned

that city into an unlivable hell where civilians were imprisoned, constantly targeted from the air and cut off from any form of aid. The Council should not stand by and watch a repetition of such events in eastern Ghouta.

Secondly, concerning the erosion of international humanitarian law, in witnessing the sheer disregard for human life, we must ask ourselves: What has become of the hard-won gains in the area of international humanitarian law? The lack of compliance with the Geneva Conventions by parties to the Syrian conflict erodes the very norms enshrined therein. It also erodes the rules-based international order. We cannot let that happen. The carnage in Syria must stop. The Council must take effective, credible and decisive action today. The world is watching. We call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict, in particular the Syrian regime and its allies, to stop the targeting of civilians, stop the attacks on hospitals and facilitate immediate access for humanitarian organizations to deliver much needed aid.

That brings me to my third point, which is action by the Council on the cessation of hostilities. We thank penholders Kuwait and Sweden for negotiating a draft resolution during the past two weeks that addresses the dire situation in Syria. We pay tribute to the prudent, inclusive manner in which Sweden and Kuwait have organized negotiations on the draft resolution. We wholeheartedly support the Swedish-Kuwaiti appeal to support their text.

The draft resolution includes clear and implementable measures. We fully support an immediate cessation of hostilities in Syria to enable aid convoys to deliver food and medicines to all those in need, and the safe medical evacuation of the critically ill and wounded. That must happen as soon as possible. Parties to the Syrian conflict and those with influence on them have a heavy responsibility to assure the safety of humanitarian operations and to ensure that no forced evacuations of civilians take place.

In conclusion, some Council members say that the draft resolution cannot be implemented because it is not realistic. But with sufficient political will on the part of the parties involved in Syria, the cessation of hostilities can become a most urgently needed reality. The Council showed forceful action when it adopted resolution 2393 (2017) in December 2017 to alleviate the suffering in Syria by allowing for vital cross-border humanitarian aid. Let us again show forceful action. Let us prove to the world that we can agree to put the safety of civilians first, throughout Syria.

The human suffering in Syria, in particular in Ghouta, must end. We need a cessation of hostilities now. We call on the Russian Federation in particular to use its influence, do its utmost to achieve that objective and allow the Council to act effectively. Let us adopt the realistic, clear and balanced draft resolution as it stands, end the violence and allow access for humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. We appreciate his efforts and understand the challenges he faces.

We are deeply concerned about the military escalation in eastern Ghouta and its devastating impact on civilians. We are also equally concerned about escalating conflict in other parts of Syria. The continued reports of attacks against medical facilities, resulting in a number of civilian deaths and injuries, is indeed extremely worrying. We stress that it is absolutely imperative to protect civilians in eastern Ghouta and other affected areas.

Nonetheless, we should never overlook the fact that the capital, Damascus, is being shelled from eastern Ghouta — one of its suburbs. All the same, it is impossible to deny the fact that life-saving aid must reach all Syrians in need of urgent assistance. In that regard, while we welcome the fact that the United Nations inter-agency convoy delivered life-saving assistance to more than 7,000 persons on 14 February, we acknowledge that, given the severity of the humanitarian situation, it is obviously not enough.

To address humanitarian needs, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners should be allowed safe, improved and unhindered humanitarian access. As the Secretary-General recalled in his statement on 20 February and through his strong appeal yesterday in the Chamber (see S/PV.8185), a cessation of hostilities is desirable to enable humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuation. We see no problem with reaching a consensus on the matter. In that connection, members of the Council have been engaged in constructive discussions on how to ensure the implementation of a cessation of hostilities.

As the situation on the ground becomes increasingly complex, we understand that implementing a humanitarian pause will not be easy. We understand

the concerns of some in that regard. We do not ignore the possibility that terrorist elements might exploit that tool to advance their goals. It will require the political will and tangible cooperation, in good faith, of all Syrian actors, as well as of all States with influence over the parties. Let us not forget that the situation in Syria is becoming extremely complicated and that the humanitarian situation has not remained unaffected. We are extremely worried about the current trajectory.

As a human tragedy unfolds before our very eyes, it is expected that the Council will take meaningful, collective action that could help save lives on the ground. That is why we have reiterated that the Council should extend its unified support for the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its partners. Only by working together will the Council convey a strong and unified message that could help facilitate the much-needed humanitarian work of the United Nations and alleviate the continued suffering of the Syrians. In that regard, the humanitarian draft resolution will perhaps provide us with a good opportunity to demonstrate our resolve for concrete action. It may not be a perfect text but we believe it paves the way for all parties to coordinate their existing efforts to halt hostilities for the sake of civilians who are in an extremely difficult situation.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the two penholders Kuwait and Sweden, which have been working tirelessly to achieve a consensus outcome. We hope they will continue their much-appreciated efforts until the last minute to address the concerns — real, legitimate concerns — of all delegations.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the escalating violence in eastern Ghouta and other parts of Syria should reinforce the importance and urgency of finding a comprehensive political solution, without which the suffering of Syrians will continue unabated.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, stated yesterday with regard to eastern Ghouta, there is no justification for the indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians, including children, or on civilian infrastructure, such as health facilities. They must stop immediately and all parties to the conflict must strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We would like to stress that all actors should use their influence to bring about immediate and improved conditions on the ground.

Once again, we urgently call for the cessation of hostilities in the whole of Syria. Attacks against civilian targets, including medical facilities, must stop now in order to relieve the enormous and unreasonable suffering of the Syrian people. We therefore call upon all parties to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children, by granting them urgent, free and safe access to humanitarian assistance.

With regard to the de-escalation zones, which include eastern Ghouta, I should recall that they were aimed at ensuring a ceasefire and humanitarian access in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law. In the light of this fact, I call on all parties engaged to respect their ceasefire-related commitments. I also call on States members of the Security Council to use their leverage on the parties in order to implement relevant previous commitments and to create conditions for a permanent ceasefire.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of humanitarian access. We should find a mutually acceptable way to express a clear position of the Security Council in this regard. Accordingly, Poland would like to reiterate its support for the work of Sweden and Kuwait as penholders of the draft humanitarian resolution for Syria. Now more than ever do we need to make every possible effort to adopt the draft resolution as soon as possible. It is the Council's responsibility not to fail to stop the ongoing humanitarian tragedy in the eastern Ghouta.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his very detailed and clear briefing today. It was very powerful to hear through him the voices of the people of eastern Ghouta.

Russia called this meeting today to allow us to present our understanding of the situation on the ground and come up with ways of getting out of the situation. We have heard very clearly from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock today and from the Secretary-General yesterday about the situation on the ground (see S/PV.8185). This is hell on Earth; the scale of the human suffering and destruction is unbearable. The suffering of the Syrian people, while primarily the responsibility of the Syrian regime, brings shame on all of us in the Security Council.

Let us be very clear about the main cause of this hell on Earth. It is the direct result of an escalation by

the Syrian regime of its aerial bombardment of civilian areas, using cluster bombs and chemical weapons and systematically killing hundreds of its own civilians. As others in this Chamber have said today, these are breaches of international humanitarian law and are war crimes. The United Kingdom will be unrelenting in its campaign to ensure accountability and justice for these crimes using all mechanisms at our disposal.

We owe it to the people of eastern Ghouta to highlight the utter devastation facing them and then to take measures to stop it. According to the Syrian American Medical Society, in the first 48 hours of this week, 250 civilians were killed and 460 injured. Those who survived these attacks have been further targeted by the regime while trying to get help for their injuries. There have been 22 separate attacks on 20 different hospitals in the three days since Monday. We applaud the incredible work of the brave doctors on the ground who risk their own lives to save others. And like the Netherlands, we salute the heroes of the White Helmets who have demonstrated incredible bravery, courage and resilience to save the lives of thousands of Syrians on all sides of this conflict.

From the start of the conflict, the Al-Assad regime has peddled the myth that all of those opposing Al-Assad are terrorists. This is manifestly not the case. The people of eastern Ghouta are not terrorists. Jabhat Al-Nusra has only a small presence in eastern Ghouta: its fighters number less than a quarter of 1 per cent of the population of that area. Nothing can justify the barbaric bombardment we have seen in recent days or the blocking of humanitarian aid or the denial of medical evacuations. We also condemn the mortar shelling from eastern Ghouta of civilian areas of Damascus and attacks against the Russian embassy in that city.

The Security Council has failed to uphold its responsibilities in Syria. We all know why this is the case, but we have all agreed that there can be no military solution to the conflict — only a political one. The actions of the Al-Assad regime in recent weeks and the military escalation in an area guaranteed by Russia and Iran as a de-escalation zone show cynical disregard by the regime for every member of the Security Council and for our resolutions. It is therefore vital that we all send a clear and unified message in response.

The solution to the situation is not difficult. We need to see an immediate cessation of hostilities, including an immediate end to the aerial bombing of eastern Ghouta. If everyone in this Chamber were to commit unequivocally to this today, it could have an impact on the ground. It could save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children who are being killed as we speak here in this Chamber today. We therefore welcome the draft resolution put forward into blue by you, Mr. President, and by the delegation of Sweden, and we look forward to a vote later today.

In conclusion, yesterday we discussed the principles of the United Nations Charter, which our predecessors drafted in the name of the peoples of the world to help save succeeding generations from the scourge of war (see S/PV.8185). It is clear that we have fallen woefully short of this aim. We have failed the people of eastern Ghouta. But let us reverse this trend today. Let us adopt the draft resolution and take the concrete actions needed to ease the suffering in this zone of death and destruction.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea thanks the Russian Federation for convening this meeting of the Security Council and hopes to contribute to the adoption of a decision aimed at alleviating the enormous suffering and regrettable loss of human life in eastern Ghouta and other parts of Syria. We thank the representative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his informative briefing.

For the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the changing humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta requires urgent action to alleviate the critical state of affairs of the most vulnerable members of the civilian population. In recent days, the number of victims and amount of material damage to infrastructure have increased considerably, and the international community is obliged to take some urgent action so as to halt the ongoing loss of lives, mostly of children and women.

We reiterate the appeal made by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea on 14 February for the parties to the conflict to allow humanitarian aid to reach those most in need (see S/PV. 8181). The cessation of hostilities is imperative in order to ensure safe access for relief teams, the distribution of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of the wounded and sick. Equatorial Guinea calls on all parties to the conflict to take the necessary steps to cease hostilities.

Frank, direct and inclusive dialogue is the only viable way out of the Syrian crisis. The Council must redouble its efforts and persuade the opponents to return to the negotiating table. In that sense, resolution 2254 (2015) remains a valid instrument. The recent history of this conflict has taught us the devastating implications that it can have for the entire region. A definitive and sustainable solution to the conflict is in the interests of all the countries of the world.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea urgently calls on all parties to the conflict, be they directly or indirectly involved, to declare a ceasefire with immediate effect that will be respected and guaranteed by all parties so as to allow for the evacuation of civilians and the delivery of medical care, drinking water and food that will save hundreds of human lives. Even as we debate this issue here in the Chamber, the people of eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria are on the verge of perishing. We must consider any proposal to be submitted from the humanitarian perspective, taking into account the suffering of the population of eastern Ghouta and Syria.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the delegation of Russia for having asked the presidency to convene this meeting, for I think it very important to exchange views about what is happening in Syria. We also grateful for the briefing by Mr. Mark Locock.

Bolivia reiterates its regret that the crisis in Syria has to date led to so many lives being lost and so much destruction. According to Mr. Lowcock's office, more than 500,000 people have died since the beginning of the conflict, 13.1 million people require humanitarian assistance, of whom 2.9 million are trapped in besieged or hard-to-reach, and 6.9 million persons have been displaced internally. We regret that recent events have led to more people dying or needing humanitarian assistance. We call for the earliest possible beginning of demining operations and for the provision of humanitarian assistance — such as to the city of Raqqa — in order to facilitate the safe and dignified return of the families that were displaced as a result of the conflict.

We also regret that the latest events in Syria have once again served to underscore the urgent need to revitalize the Geneva political process, while strengthening the tangible results achieved in Astana and Sochi, in consultation, of course, with all the parties concerned. We reiterate what several of our colleagues have said during this meeting: there is no military solution to the situation in Syria, only a political one.

We also again reiterate our great gratitude for the work being done by the staff of the humanitarian assistance agencies and groups on the ground. We demand that the parties involved comply with their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We reiterate to the parties involved that they must respect the agreements and the de-escalation zones, as well as avoid attacks on civilian facilities — such residential areas, schools and hospitals — in line with international humanitarian law, so as to ensure the protection of civilians and unrestricted access for humanitarian agencies to provide much-needed assistance.

I understand that we all agree with those principles, as they are basic, fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. Each and every one of us has spoken repeatedly about the obligations of the Security Council under the Charter of the United Nations, including its highest responsibility in terms of the maintenance of international peace and security. Nevertheless, my delegation cannot agree with double standards being applied on any issue, and much less on humanitarian ones. We must not drag down the Security Council by using it as an instrument for a different agenda. Nor, as we have also said several times, should we allow the Council to become an echo chamber where we repeatedly recite well-known areas of war.

In referring to double standards, I will desist from referring to the humanitarian situation in other places around the world. I will limit myself just to Syria. My delegation is surprised, and does not understand, at how the Security Council has not even been able to express itself on the terrorist attacks on the Russian Embassy in Damascus, a member the Council. We have counted six such attacks in the past two weeks, followed by silence on the part of the Council. That should draw our attention as to double standards.

I repeat that we totally reject the politicization of any humanitarian issue. We know that the situation in Syria is urgent. We need to think very carefully about how we can address each of these situations, given that each has its particular characteristics.

With regard to the draft resolution that has been circulated for the Council's consideration, first of all, my delegation would like to sincerely express its gratitude for the efforts of the delegations of Sweden and Kuwait. We have seen them work with great dedication, consulting with the various delegations as part of what of course is a complicated process. That is the nature of negotiations. We hope that the various calls for the Council to do something will come to fruition. . However, I think we have to recognize that putting to a vote a draft resolution, as several delegations have called for today, in the knowledge that it will not be adopted by the Council shows that the goal is not of a humanitarian nature, the aim is political. Putting to a vote a draft resolution while knowing that it will not be adopted means that the goal is not to alleviate the humanitarian situation but to garner a few headlines in the media. That is why we say that we should avoid making the Council an instrument for political ends.

We very much welcome the fact that the Russian delegation has put forward language to enable us to continue the negotiations, which is essential. I agree with what my colleague the Ambassador of Sweden said, that is, the Council is being tested in alleviating the humanitarian situation in Syria. The Council is indeed being tested, and that test is to achieve unity in the Council. If we do not, then the meeting at which the draft resolution is put to the vote will go down in history as just a few headlines. But it will come to nothing and will in no way alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria.

I therefore issue a fraternal call on my colleagues the members of the Security Council — especially my beloved brothers the Ambassadors of Sweden and Kuwait — that we do everything we can to send out a signal for there to be a change in direction with regard to what the Council has been doing repeatedly over the past months, and show that by being united we will in some way be able to meet the expectations of the rest of the membership and meet the responsibilities assigned to us by the Charter.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank the Russian Federation for having called for this meeting.

I also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his helpful briefing on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria, which has reached a critical threshold.

Côte d'Ivoire remains deeply concerned by the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation, largely due to the resurgence of fighting on the ground, particularly in eastern Ghouta where since Monday, I regret to say, 40 civilians have been killed and more than 150 wounded, and many hospitals and schools have been destroyed. In the face of this extreme escalation of hostilities, my delegation would like, following the call issued yesterday in this Chamber by Secretary-General António Guterres (see S/PV.8185), to appeal to the sense of responsibility of the parties involved to end the tragedy of eastern Ghouta. It urges them to exercise restraint with a view to an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to enable the resumption of the delivery of humanitarian aid, including medical evacuations, to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its conviction and principled position that the response to the crisis in Syria cannot be military. On the contrary, it should be pursued through an inclusive dialogue and political process, as provided for in the road map set out by resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, in the light of the tragic humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta — which Mr. Lowcock so somberly described earlier — Côte d'Ivoire supports the draft resolution proposed by the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden, calling for a cessation of hostilities for a period of 30 days with a view to allowing immediate humanitarian access to the besieged populations of the region. The Council must set aside all political calculations and other distractions and undertake the commendable task of rescuing the inhabitants of eastern Ghouta and other regions of Syria, who also happen to be Syrians, from the hell in which they are living.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for initiating this open briefing on the very critical humanitarian issue in Syria, and thank Mark Lowcock for his update.

Like others, we express our serious concern about the continued severity of the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, including in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and northern Hama governorates, Rukban and Raqqa. Kazakhstan urges all parties within and outside the country to prevent further violence and enable humanitarian organizations to access and assist people in need. Since early February, with the military offensive against eastern Ghouta, there have been more than 1,200 civilian casualties.

We truly need a cessation of hostilities and all military operations throughout Syria to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid and services and the medical evacuation of the critically sick and wounded, in accordance with international law. Kazakhstan considers it critical for the Security Council to adopt a workable and effective resolution on a cessation of hostilities in Syria, a draft of which is now being considered by Council members. Kazakhstan calls on all parties to find consensus and unite in their efforts to undertake an immediate suspension of all war activities in eastern Ghouta and other parts of Syria, allowing humanitarian aid to reach all those in need, as well as the evacuation of all patients requiring urgent treatment that cannot be provided there.

My delegation supports the five requests identified by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on 11 January during his mission to Syria, and calls upon all parties to facilitate the implementation of these five requests and others, as specified in relevant Security Council resolutions, so as to ensure principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2018. In this context, we look forward to a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the guarantor countries of the Astana process — namely, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran — who intend to gather in Astana in March to discuss all issues related to recent developments on the ground. The timing and the specific agenda are currently being specified. In this regard, the next round of the Astana process itself is scheduled to be held after the aforementioned meeting of the Foreign Ministers.

Lastly, in May 2017 Kazakhstan welcomed the adoption of the memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic. They have lessened hostilities between the conflicting parties. However, the ceasefire agreements in these zones are currently being violated. We attach the utmost importance to compliance by all conflicting parties with ceasefire agreements and their enforcement by the guarantor States. Likewise, each of the agreements reached in Astana should not remain on paper, but must be strictly complied with.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and urge him to limit his statement to five minutes in accordance with Security Council note S/2017/507.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of my country was not aware of your decision, Sir, to limit my statement to five minutes. I oppose that decision and therefore reserve the right to express the views of my country in this important meeting devoted to the situation in my country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We fail to understand, Sir, why you have proposed limiting the statement of the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on the important issue under discussion. His country is directly involved and where everything being discussed is taking place. We must afford an opportunity for the representative of Syria to speak for the full amount of time required to deliver his statement. I do not believe we need any artificial limits on his statement.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I did not make a decision. I simply encouraged the representative of Syria to adhere to the provisions of note S/2017/507.

I again give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, I reiterate that we were not aware of note S/2017/507. I believe that this act is unjust and raises many issues to which I already intended to refer in my statement. I hope that everyone will be patient enough to listen to the statement I shall make on behalf of the Government of my country. I shall not deliver a personal statement. All speakers have spoken on behalf of their Governments, and I shall do the same. I encourage all members to listen carefully to what I have to say.

As I talk here at this moment, hundreds of rockets and mortars are targeting the capital, Damascus. To date, they have injured 37 people, including six children, and led to a number of martyrs, including two children. That comes as no surprise. As the Council is aware, every time a Security Council meeting is held to discuss the Syrian situation, there is a massacre here and a suicide bombing there, as well as the killing of civilians in some Syrian cities. We have seen not dozens, but rather hundreds of massacres over the past seven years. Mr. Lowcock did not get this information the way he gets messages from what he calls humanitarian workers in eastern Ghouta who know about international humanitarian law. Mr. Lowcock,

did not solicit the views of the Syrian Government, which we have expressed in hundreds of letters sent to him and to the Council. All those who in this meeting have used the word "regime" to refer to my country are neither objective nor impartial. They reveal their countries' involvement in the ongoing terrorist crisis in my country.

We thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for convening this meeting to give us the opportunity to once again present the reality of the suffering of civilians as a result of the practices of armed terrorist groups or, as some call them, moderate armed opposition groups. Over the past seven years, they have been sowing death and destruction wherever they have operated. They have used civilians as human shields. They have targeted hospitals and schools, turning them into military centres. They have hurled missiles and rockets indiscriminately at residential and populated areas.

Of course, as the Permanent Representative of France said before leaving this meeting, all of this is a form of resistance. He referred to the terrorists who bombard Damascus as the "resistance" that the Syrian regime is trying to suppress. This meeting is particularly important, as some actors — especially the United States of America and the so-called international coalition — have moved from the stage of aggression by proxy through their support for terrorism to the stage of direct aggression. Those actors have recruited terrorists from all four corners of the world. They call them jihadists and send them to Syria. Whenever terrorists have failed, those actors have been there — militarily, politically, through the media and the United Nations — to intervene in order to achieve what their terrorist proxies failed to achieve.

Let us be clear. Some Council members — and I specifically mean the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France — would like to deprive the Syrian Government of its constitutional and sovereign right to defending its territories and people, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations back when we had wise founding fathers and international law and as guaranteed by all United Nations resolutions on counter-terrorism.

Today, I have heard references to the draft resolution contained in document S/2018/146, on humanitarian issues. The penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, have been working on it for several weeks. I thank them for their efforts. However, those efforts are deeply flawed. The penholders did not coordinate with the Syrian delegation at all. They did not even ask to hear my country's view on the draft resolution that concerns it.

Let us imagine for a moment that hundreds of terrorists had used the Bois de Boulogne as a centre to target civilians in Paris, launching dozens of missiles every day. Would we have seen a draft resolution calling for a humanitarian truce to give the moderate armed French opposition the opportunity to regain its power and launch missiles targeting Paris?

Let us imagine for a moment that hundreds of terrorists had used Central Park here in New York as a centre to target civilians in Manhattan, and had launched dozens of missiles every day. Would we have seen a draft resolution calling for the medical evacuation of the moderate armed American opposition?

Let us imagine for a moment that hundreds of terrorists had used Hyde Park as a centre to target civilians in London, launching dozens of missiles daily. Would we have seen a draft resolution calling for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the moderate armed British opposition? Would we have seen statements by high-level Secretariat officials, such as Mr. Lowcock, calling for stopping the fight against armed groups that they describe as non-State armed opposition groups? Unfortunately, that is how United Nations documents refer to terrorists nowadays — non-State armed opposition groups.

Of course, those are all hypothetical scenarios that might seem far-fetched. However, that is the reality in Syria. It is the tragedy that we are seeing in Syrian cities every day, including the city of Damascus and its inhabitants. It is a bitter reality that the Syrian Government is facing as a result of the erroneous approaches adopted by the United Nations and the positions of some of its Member States. Damascus is the oldest populated city in history. It is seeing destruction, death and sorrow every day as a result of missiles, mortars and rockets launched by armed terrorist groups operating in eastern Ghouta. These terrorist groups — the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated groups — are designated as terrorist groups in the Security Council. Today, 8 million people live in Damascus, among them hundreds of thousands who fled armed groups that attacked their villages and their homes in many parts of Syria, including eastern Ghouta.

The United Nations today is going through a professional and moral crisis that is unfathomable. High-level Secretariat officials see no harm in adopting the positions of Governments that sponsor terrorism in my country. They are directly involved in distorting facts, manipulating figures, using insidious phrases and terminology, and depending on unreliable sources in their statements and reports. Of course, I cannot list all of those scandals today. I will only remind the Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-Finding Mission report (S/2017/567), issued in June 2017. The report states that among the open sources on which it relied was the testimony of British doctor Shajul Islam. For those who do not know who Mr. Islam is, he is a foreign terrorist fighting for the Al-Nusra Front in Idlib. He was convicted in the United Kingdom and was not allowed to practice medicine there as he was involved in crimes related to terrorism, such as kidnapping British journalist John Cantlie. That is but one example of some misleading reports issued by the Secretariat.

We are convinced that those abhorren practices will not stop and that some United Nations officials will ignore the serious information that we have conveyed to them about armed terrorist groups fabricating the story that the Syrian Government used toxic chemical substances against civilians in eastern Ghouta. Those groups are training some of their members to pretend that they have been exposed to toxic substances. Of course, those scenes are broadcast by well-known networks and correspondents of Mr. Lowcock, and the Syrian Arab Army is blamed for it. Although we have sent hundreds of letters to the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and specialized United Nations agencies specialized in counter-terrorism and the prohibition of chemical weapons, we are sure that some at the United Nations will not hesitate to believe that story and blame the Syrian Government. That is simply because certain agendas in the Organization compel some to join in the extortion of the Syrian Arab Republic and its allies that are fighting terrorism on behalf of all those present.

For over two months now, the Syrian Government has been sending letters almost daily to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council documenting the number of missiles used, which have amounted in the past few weeks to almost 1,200. We have been also documenting the human and material losses of civilians in the city of Damascus as a result of being targeted by terrorists groups in eastern Ghouta. However, in its statements and appeals the Secretariat has no problem ignoring the suffering of 8 million people in Damascus. It has not hesitated to participate in the misleading campaign launched by some States to protect a few thousand members of armed terrorists groups in eastern Ghouta. They are sacrificing 8 million civilians in Damascus to protect a few thousand terrorists in eastern Ghouta. This is scene in short.

Both international and United Nations sources are spreading news of a stifling siege on eastern Ghouta. That is not consistent with the indisputable reality on the ground. We are talking here about a vital area that is the main source of food for the city of Damascus. Commercial trucks constantly move back and forth to Ghouta. The Syrian Government has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in eastern Ghouta, when conditions on the ground have allowed. We have also approved medical evacuations to Government hospitals in Damascus. The truth that we all know, and even high-level Secretariat officials know, is that armed terrorist groups are controlling the humanitarian aid that enters eastern Ghouta. They distribute it among its members and deprive civilians of any of it.

There is another truth that the Secretariat is ignoring. Residents of eastern Ghouta have taken to the street in protest against the practices of terrorists who point their guns at innocent people. Of course, those besieged innocents are also sending messages, but Mr. Lowcock's radar is not receiving them. I would like to ask the Secretariat the following. How does it justify ignoring the reports and information that the Syrian Government has presented on thousands of hostages and kidnapped people being detained by armed terrorist groups in eastern Ghouta in the so-called Attawba prison? They require immediate medical evacuation. The United Nations is ignoring video footage posted by armed groups showing women and children, among the hostages, being pushed into metal cages and left on the street. It is a painful scene reminiscent of the times of slavery. It is true insanity that the Secretary-General spoke of yesterday and has been echoed by some colleagues today. Yes, there is terrorist insanity in eastern Ghouta and we must put a stop to it.

What is even worse is that some in the Secretariat are trying to use the agreement on de-escalation zones to distort the facts and ignore repeated violations perpetrated by these armed terrorist groups. They are

being instructed from the outside by actors that some of them are present in this Chamber. They are instructed to target Syrian military sites and launch attacks using rockets, missiles and car bombs on residential neighbourhoods in Damascus.

These groups operating in eastern Ghouta that kill civilians in Damascus daily are armed terrorists groups, regardless of any change to their names, affiliations or alliances. Today they are Jaysh al-Islam, the Al-Rahman Corps, the Dawn of Islam and Ahrar al-Sham. Yesterday they were the Islamic Front, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Al-Nusra Front. I invite all members of the Council to take a look at the websites of those groups and the satellite television channels that Western satellites are helping broadcast. It will become apparent that they all share the same Wahhabi terrorist ideology, and that they all call for takfiri ideas and the annihilation of others. Any attempt to change their names and description by calling them moderate opposition or non-state armed groups will not change their terrorist reality. It will not prevent us, as the Government, from defending our citizens with the support of our allies, and fighting terrorism pursuant to the Council's resolutions on counter-terrorism.

Some among us today are exploiting the suffering of the Syrian people and trading in their blood. They are demanding accountability while being direct partners in supporting and defending terrorism. They are involved in direct military aggression against my people, as was the case in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Africa and Latin America. The dilemma that we are facing today is that the mechanism of work inside the United Nations is being held hostage to political and financial polarization. As a result, this mechanism of work completely disregard the crimes of the so-called international coalition led by the United States of America.

As mentioned by my colleague the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, the international coalition completely destroyed Raqqa, killing hundreds of civilians and destroying shelters, infrastructure and bridges over the Euphrates river and everywhere in Syria, under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It used internationally prohibited weapons against civilians in Syria, including American Napalm, just as it did in Viet Nam. The international coalition targeted Syrian armed forces and allied forces more than once in order to break the siege on ISIL. The coalition and its militias made a deal with ISIL so that ISIL fighters, their families and their heavy weapons could leave Raqqa and other places in order to fight the Syrian forces and their allies elsewhere.

The United Nations is completely disregarding the repeated aggressions of Israeli occupation forces on our territories as part of its support to armed terrorist groups. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is clueless as to what is going on in the Golan. The United Nations itself is completely disregarding Turkish aggressions and violations against Syrian sovereignty, and the direct military aggression initiated now by Turkey on Afrin. Nobody has addressed this issue in their statements.

In conclusion, responding to those who fear that eastern Ghouta might become a second Aleppo, I invite them to go to Aleppo today and see with their own eyes how millions, not thousands, have resumed their normal lives after Aleppo was liberated from terrorism. Indeed, eastern Ghouta will become a second Aleppo, as will Idlib and all areas that have suffered under the terrorism of armed groups in Syria.

We will not succumb no longer to the extortion of those who have supported terrorism in Syria. We will not be complacent to the plans of the Governments of the five States that met in Washington, D.C., last month to divide Syria and ensure the failure of both the Sochi conference and the political process as a whole. That news was reported today in the United Kingdom.

We will not sit idly by while those who use terrorism, take unjust economic measures and wage direct military aggression against the Syrian people seek to achieve their cheap political agendas. Rest assured that history will soon admit that we and our allies have fought a war on behalf of the entire world against terrorism, which is being supported by Governments that soon will be held accountable by their people and world public opinion. Those Governments have invested all they can in terrorism until it reached their cities, their own citizens and all safe places throughout the world.

When I look at some of the faces in the Chamber and see the political hypocrisy therein, I recall the famous adage by the Great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who said: "Rest assured, hell is big enough for everyone. There is no need for people to compete so fiercely to be the worst."

The meeting rose at 2.10 p.m.